FEBRUARY

Weird Tales

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All Stories Complete

THE GLOBE OF MEMORIES

an uncanny story of stealthily creeping terror

By SEABURY QUINN

Robert E. Howard

Loretta Burrough

Henry Kuttner

Frank Owen

FEBRUARY, 1937

WEIRD TALES

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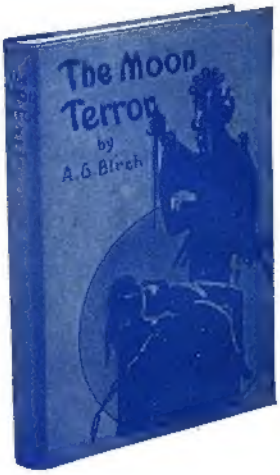
The Phantom of the Ether



The first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

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"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with, all existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.

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Weird Tales

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Volume 29 CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY, 1937 Number 2

Cover Design . . . . . Virgil Finlay
Illustrating a scene from "The Globe of Memories"

The Globe of Memories . . . . . Seabury Quinn 130
A startling weird tale of two different ages, separated by seven centuries

Dead Singer . . . . . Edgar Daniel Kramer 157
Verse

I, the Vampire . . . . . Henry Kuttner 158
The tale of a dark horror that settled down like a fog on Hollywood, the world's film capital

Dig Me No Grave . . . . . Robert E. Howard 171
A shuddery tale of the uncanny funeral rites over the corpse of old John Grimlan

The Vaunsburg Plague . . . . . Julius Long 180
A weird-scientific story of a dread ray which turned vigorous young men and women into doddering, senile creatures in a few seconds

The Beggar . . . . . Frances Elliott 193
Verse

The Poppy Pearl . . . . . Frank Owen 194
A startling novelette of the shanghaiing of Guy Sellers and a series of astounding weird adventures on an opium ship

Song of the Necromancer . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 220
Verse

At the Time Appointed . . . . . Loretta Burrough 221
A father's hate for a son culminates in a ghastly jest in the silent tomb

Glory Hand . . . . . August W. Derleth 231
An odd and curious story about a weird fetish that carried death

Masquerade . . . . . Mearle Prout 237
A brief tale of a struggle against stark horror in a lantern-lit garden

Weird Story Reprint:

A Gipsy Prophecy . . . . . Bram Stoker 241
A story by the author of "Dracula"

The Eyrie 249
Our readers exchange opinions

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Globe of Memories

By SEABURY QUINN

A story of stealthily creeping terror which rises by gradations to a climax of sheer horror

MONTAGU gazed affectionately on his latest acquisition. Poking through the maze of "antique shoppes" that line Third Avenue where it bounds Murray Hill upon the east, he had come upon the little sphere of crystal, and his heart warmed to it at first glance. There was a vacancy on the third shelf of his glass-window and the little, faintly iridescent globe would fill it admirably—fill it as though made to order.

He set the vitric orb upon his desk and gazed into its limpid depths. It was something like three inches in diameter, crystalline and faintly cloudy at once, and in its center stood a tiny house with grouping, battlemented towers and a castellated roof. From the barbicans there sloped a series of green terraces, all fashioned out of frail, bright glass, and in the background, almost microscopically small, showed the spires and roofs of a walled town.

"Clever people, these Chinese or French or Czechs or whoever made this thing," grinned Montagu as he raised the glass sphere level with his eyes and watched the play of sunlight through its lucid depths. "They must—I say!" he broke off wonderingly and blinked perplexedly. With the movement of his hand some sort of sediment in the liquid filling of the globe had been disturbed, and a vague obscurity began to shroud the tiny castle from his gaze. It was not quite like the limy white of stirred-up sediment, however; rather, it resembled slowly drifting smoke or thickening whorls of gathering fog.

He shook his head to clear his eyes. That must be it. Gazing in the crystal held against the light had dazzled him. He closed his eyes against the baffling mist which swirled inside the ball, and secure in knowing every inch of the study floor, stepped toward the table to replace the little sphere. One, two steps he had taken when an unfamiliar sound beneath his feet forced both eyes open suddenly.

He was not treading on the well-worn Hamadan which carpeted his study floor; he was walking on a graveled path and his feet were stockingless and shod with sandals of rough rawhide.

"This is amaz—great Scott!" he muttered. His gait was hampered by the folds of something like a heavy gown which flapped against his shins. It was rough, coarse stuff, an indeterminate, slate-gray in color, and enveloped him from neck to ankles. Hanging from his throat across his breast and nearly to his garment's hem was a sort of apron of rough serge, and under this about his waist was bound a girdle of coarse hempen cord with knotted ends that struck against his knees at every step. Dependent from the girdle was a strand of heavy skull-shaped beads strung on an iron chain and arranged in series, groups of ten beads, each about the size of a small marble, being separated from one another by knobs the size of a shelled hazelnut. At the end was a bead of walnut's size with a brass-and-wooden crucifix hung from it.

"Good Lord!" gasped Montagu, "this is a mediæval friar's costume! What——" Involuntarily, he raised his hand to brush his hair back—a gesture he was wont to make when puzzled—and the sharp cry of dismay he gave was tragic. His hair grew thickly down about his temples, and its natural curl had caused him some bad moments as a schoolboy. Now, as he passed his hand across his head, his fingers touched smooth scalp, a head from which the hair was shaven in a circle as though marked off by a skull-cap, then shaved before the ears and upward from the nape of the neck till only a thin line of close-cropped hair was left to band his head, as though a wreath of stubble had been laid upon an utterly bald scalp.

"If this is a dream," he told himself, "it's a most unpleasant one. I must——"

Through the fog which filled the air a figure loomed before him, a figure clad in a long gown. He could not tell at first if it were man or woman, but as the shape advanced he saw it was a man who wore his hair cut in a bob that reached down to the bottoms of his ears, and was dressed in a loose robe of some woolen

"Diabolus?" she called. "Are you here, my love? I cannot see you."

stuff of somber bottle-green. Beneath the gown he wore red stockings which reached up his legs like tights; long, pointed shoes were on his feet; a peak-crowned cap trimmed with a heron's feather sat upon his straight black hair. His skin was very dark and his eyes so large and black and deep-set that they looked like oval pits of darkness set beneath his overhanging brows.

"*Dominus tecum,* Fra Albertus," he greeted with a cold, unpleasant smile.

"*Pax tecum,*" answered Montagu, not realizing till the gesture was complete that he had raised his right hand and described a cross with it.

"What made me do that?" he demanded of himself as he stepped along the gravel path. "It was the proper thing to do, of course, but how did I know——" his voice trailed off in silent wonder as he looked before him.

THE mists had cleared, and he was coming to a castle, its walls and battlements in sharp relief against the fresh blue sky. He recognized it instantly. Point for point and line for line, it was the castle of the glass globe, enlarged a hundred thousand times, but faithful in its reproduction. Across a valley, clearly outlined in the sunlight, rose the walls and spires and red-tiled roofs of a small town.

Terraces of close-clipped grass stretched from the castle walls to a small river. Luminously green in the rays of the declining sun, the upper levels reached to the wide moat; the lower banks were mottled with deep shadow where the shade of ancient trees was cast. A company of young men in bright costumes played at quoits upon the green, and as he passed they ceased their sport and greeted him respectfully, though without a sign of cordiality. "*Dominus vobiscum,*" he murmured as he raised his hand in that familiar-unfamiliar sign and continued straight across the drawbridge which gave entry to the castle gate.

A dozen halberdiers in brazen helmets and cuirasses and tall boots of Spanish leather lounged in the guardroom. Czechs these; light-eyed, yellow-bearded Dalmatian mercenaries faithful to their bread and salt, and to nothing else beneath the dome of heaven. Their leader greeted Montagu with neither friendship nor hostility.

"Thou'rt expected, Fra Alberto," he announced. "Go thou to the chapel; I'll send a varlet to inform the lady Fulvia of thy coming."

Montagu was aware the guardsman did not speak in English, yet what the language was he had no idea. At any rate, he had no difficulty in understanding.

"Wilt send one with me to the chapel?" he returned, and as he spoke he realized he used the same strange tongue the captain of the guard employed. "Mine eyes are dazzled from the sun."

The warder eyed him sharply, then turned to a subordinate who lounged upon a bench.

"Get thee to the chapel wi' Messer Cheat-the-Devil," he commanded. "His eyes are holden wi' the dark."

None too cheerfully the fellow rose, slipped his sword into his bawdric loop and led the way along the corridor.

It was cold as a sealed tomb inside the castle. Here and there the stone walls ran with clammy sweat where the moisture in the heated air had been congealed on them. At intervals, though not with any sort of regularity, the stones were hung with Flemish tapestries. Here and there stone lamps like little basins protruded from the walls, and in them floated burning wicks, but the principal illumination came from swinging lamps with shades of bright Venetian glass which

splashed down little pools of red or violet or green upon the gray floor-tiles.

The chapel was a sanctuary of cool twilight. A few stray sunbeams slanted through the intricately carved mullions of the narrow windows and wrought net-like figures on the floor, bringing into bright relief the glowing colors of the Isphahan carpets which were spread upon the stones. A tapestry depicting the Nativity hung across one wall; from the groined and carved ceiling hung a sanctus lamp of hammered silver and bright ruby glass which cast a ruddy glow upon the marble altar with its cloth of fair white linen and its cross of beaten brass. Opposite the altar was the entrance to the vesting-room, where stoles of crimson and bright yellow and a set of vestments for the acolytes were hung. Beside the door stood the confessional, carved of age-discolored oak. Instinctively Montagu swung back its gate and shut himself inside, and as he did so caught the rustle of a woman's garments.

He could see her indistinctly through the lattice, a tall and slender figure cloaked in somber black, a white veil bound about her head and gathered loosely round her face. This much he saw, but whether she were dark or fair, young, old or middle-aged, he could not tell.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned," came a faint, soft voice, and as he leant his cheek against the grille he felt the stirring of soft breath against his ear and caught the faintly tantalizing aroma of the flower-essence that clung about her garments.

Mechanically, unwittingly, but perfectly, he made the proper responses, asked the proper searching questions, and marveled as he did so. Born and reared a Unitarian, son and grandson of devoted members of that informal faith, he knew by instinct every nuance of the Roman rubric!

The confession was a short one, and in less than fifteen minutes Montagu had murmured his *absolvo te,* and his penitent departed silently as she had come.

SLOWLY he rose from the padded cushion where he knelt, let himself out from the confessional and stood a moment by the chapel door. He had no idea what his next move was; perhaps he could retrace his steps and find the castle entrance——

"Ho, Messer Dodge-the-Evil-One," a loud voice greeted, "her ladyship commands thy presence in her bower. She'll have thee break thy fast with her. Fair gospel, eh, my friend? A monk hath never so much of prayer that he can forget his belly, meseemeth."

"Cease thy prating, varlet; lead me to her ladyship," Montagu's tone was sharp with quick resentment.

" 'Varlet?' This to me, thou shave-pate?" cried the soldier. "By'r Lady, if 'twere not for that long robe o' thine——" Half jocosely, half angrily, he thrust his halberd-head at Montagu.

Next instant he was sprawling on the floor, for Montagu had snatched the pike-staff from his hand and dealt him such a blow that had not the fellow's skull been guarded by a morion he would have been knocked senseless.

"Now, by the seven thousand holy virgins of Cologne, monk or no monk, I'll have the gizzard out of thee for that!" the guardsman roared, springing to his feet and dragging at his sword.

It was Fra Albertus he attacked, but it was Albert Montagu, captain, O.R.C., expert with the bayonet and three times medal winner with the foil and saber, who opposed him. Steel of sword and steel of halberd struck together with a clash; the guardsman beat and hammered with his blade, while Montagu advanced against him steadily, never letting him

have peace, constantly menacing him with his halberd's point. Awkwardly the soldier parried a quick thrust, then lunged out madly. It was the opening Montagu had waited. With a quick riposte he drove his longer weapon underneath the guardsman's blade, then, checking his arm in mid-thrust, brought the wide head of his halberd up, driving its flat against his adversary's forearm with such force that the sword fell clattering from the fellow's nerveless fingers, leaving him unweaponed and defenseless while the pike-blade shone with deadly menace in his eyes.

A lightly-clapping sound, as though soft palms were struck together, broke the pregnant silence, and a cool, imperious voice commanded: "Give him absolution and the *coup de grâce,* Sir Monk. Meseems that he expects it. So do I."

Montagu whirled at the words, a hot flush mounting to his cheeks. There was more than gentle irony intended, he was sure. The speaker really wished to see him kill his unarmed adversary.

Framed in the roseate patch of light cast by a swinging lamp she stood before him like a portrait from some mediævel romance. Tall, willowy, aloof and proud as Lucifer's half-sister she appeared, but so beautiful that he was fairly breathless at the sight of her.

She wore a wide-sleeved overmantle of deep violet, trimmed about the edges with the regal ermine, and under it a narrow gown of cloth of gold. Her hair was smoothly parted in the middle, and its cloven tide flowed down across her shoulders in two heavy plaits which reached her knees and were laced with strands of pearls. Upon her head, less aureate than the smooth bright hair it covered, was a little cap of golden net sewn thick with seed-pearls. Upon her narrow feet were pointed shoes of creamy leather threaded with gold bullion, appliqued with violet silk and tipped with incrustations of small sapphires. Her face was pale as Parian marble, save for the scarlet line of pomegranate-red lips, eyes of the clear blue of summer skies; serene and lovely, an arrogant, narrow chin, long, tapering brows and nostrils slim with hauteur. The youthfulness of her slight body shone resplendent through the golden tissue of her gown like a pale, hot flame that shines through polished ivory.

"Lay on, Sir Friar," she bade him while her narrow nostrils flared the faintest bit with pleased anticipation. "That was a shrewdly smitten blow. I wait the finish."

Albert shrugged his shoulders in annoyance. "Here, fellow, take thy tools, and be more cautious ere ye seek another quarrel," he admonished as he flung the halberd at the guardsman's feet.

"You wished converse with me, my lady?" he asked the girl with a cold, formal bow.

"Now, by'r Lady, it doth seem to me thou'rt grown in courtesy," she answered as her cool eyes swept appraisingly over his bare, sandaled feet, his gown of sackcloth and his shaven head. " 'Twill mend my mood to break my fast with thee today."

Silently she turned upon her soft-soled shoes and led the way along the corridor.

THE room to which she led him occupied a portion of the tower looking out across the valley. Almost circular in shape, it was a fairly large apartment having divans at the walls strewn with silk cushions of bright colors. The few articles of furniture, scant but of decided elegance, were oriental in design, as was the bronze lamp hanging from the ceiling.

She struck a silver gong and almost

instantly a serving-wench appeared with a wooden salver piled with food. In silver dishes there were pigeons stewed in wine, a loaf of white bread graced a platter, and from a silver pitcher curled the fragrant steam of hot, spiced wine. Two small goat-horns, framed in silver stands and exquisitely inlaid, served as goblets, and for dessert were comfits made of marchpane. There were neither forks nor spoons, but two small daggers, razor-sharp, lay on the tray, and with these they dismembered the stewed pigeons, thrusting the pieces into their mouths and pausing between mouthfuls to immerse their fingers in a ewer of warm, perfumed water and wipe them on the napkins of white linen.

As they ate she studied him with black-fringed, curious eyes.

"Methinks thou'rt somewhat different, Fra Alberto," she observed at length, and as Montagu looked up he caught the flicker of a dimple shadowed in her cheek.

In a polished silver mirror he beheld a picture, but it was not one he recognized. The face was like his own, but the gleaming white of hairless scalp, accentuated by the narrow fringe of close-cropped hair which circled round his skull, gave it a wholly alien appearance. The collar of a coarse gown came high about his neck, and at the back there showed the swelling of the cowl which hung between his shoulders.

"Aye, different," he repeated, turning from the vision of that shaven-pated head. "I am surely not the man I was this morning."

"Man?" she echoed with a touch of acid irony. "Are monks, then, men? Had thought that they were a third sex, neither male nor female, like those bees that make no honey."

Montagu could feel his cheeks grow warm. This chit, this little mediæval savage, who could probably not write her name! An angry retort mounted to his lips, and:

"What thinkest thou concerning me, *ma donna?*" he heard himself replying. She studied him a moment, her virginally blue eyes taking inventory of him from his sandaled feet to tonsured head, and she seemed to find the survey faintly entertaining, for again there was a hint of smile upon her mobile lips, the merest hint of dimples deepening in her cheeks.

"Sith thou hast asked, methinks thou'rt more a man than monk," she answered. "I saw thy strife with Hursar by the chapel door, and for a moment I did pray that he would spit thee, but when I saw how manfully thou fought, my prayers were all for thee. By Agnes' eyes, that was a shrewdly given blow wherewith thou didst unsword the villain!"

"But why should you have prayed he'd run me through?" asked Montagu.

Defiance mixed with pride showed in her pale, patrician face. "Those twenty *aves* and two *paters* said whilst kneeling bare-kneed on the gravel of the pleasaunce walk did not engender Christian charity."

Montagu looked at her in amazement. "Twenty *aves* . . . kneeling bare-kneed on the gravel?" he repeated slowly. "When——"

His question died as he looked in her face. Half wonderingly, half fearfully, she gazed at him, her lips a little parted, something like a frightened recognition dawning in her eyes. One slim hand fluttered to her throat and he saw the signet cut in amethyst gleam on her forefinger.

"Thy eyes — thy voice — they are not——" she began, but stopped abruptly as a shadow fell athwart the threshold.

Smiling bleakly, the man whom he had met as he approached the castle stood at

gaze, and it seemed to Montagu there was a light of mocking mirth in his dark eyes.

"How now, my lord Antonio?" asked the lady Fulvia. "You come unbidden to my bower——"

"If thou canst entertain one man at meat, meseems thou hast scant right to take offense when thy affianced waits on thee," he answered with a bow.

"We are not yet affianced," she returned, "and I entertain no men within my bower. Knowest well that Fra Alberto is my ghostly counsellor; I must hold converse with him for my soul's good."

The man's deep eyes regarded her ironically, but he made no answer. Instead, he turned to Montagu and scrutinized him narrowly. "I hear thou hast distinction as a man of arms, as well as one of God, Fra 'berto," he said slowly. "A very paragon of manly strength, though somewhat lacking in the manly beauty that appeals to ladies' hearts." He fixed his speculative gaze upon the tonsure which disfigured Albert's head; then with another bitter smile: "Still, a young and stalwart monk is better than no man at all, I wis——"

"Antonio!" Flaming-cheeked, the lady Fulvia faced him, her small hands clenched until the nails bit deep into her palms.

"You swine!" Despite the handicap of clinging cassock, Albert crossed the room in two long strides and seized the fellow by the shoulders. "Apologize to Lady Fulvia, or——"

HER scream gave warning of his peril, and he glanced down just in time to see Antonio's hand drag at the poniard at his belt.

Quickly loosening the grip of his right hand, he pushed out with his left, spun the other half-way round, slipped his disengaged hand underneath his arm, clasped his neck in a half-nelson and wrenched with all his might.

Beneath the unexpected pressure Antonio turned a somersault, pitched headlong to the floor and sprawled upon the carpet.

"Santo Dio!" He roused to his knees, eyes bright with fear. "No man art thou, but a dev——"

The smash of Albert's fist against his mouth broke off his words.

"Crave pardon of the lady Fulvia, or I'll beat thee to a posset!" he warned. "Hold up thy hands, thou dog; hold up thy hands in prayer and name thyself the foul liar that thou art!"

"Nay, nay, Fra 'berto, do not strike again!" the girl besought as Montagu drew back his fist. "Antonio is truly penitent; he spoke in thoughtlessness, and did not mean his words——"

"I spake in thoughtlessness, and am truly penitent," the man repeated through blenched lips. "Prithee, sweet cousin, bid him let me go in peace!"

"Begone in peace," she answered almost listlessly.

Antonio crept trembling toward the door, but at the sill he turned and bent his thumbs across his palms, encircling them with the second and third fingers, holding the first and little fingers straight. Thus clasped, he thrust his hands at Montagu.

"Aroint thee, Satanas!" he gasped. "Thou canst not harm me——"

Albert took a forward step, and the door slammed to between them.

Turning, he faced the girl, who stood up straight before him, hands clasped before her, as if in prayer.

"Art feared of me—Fulvia?" he asked softly, dropping the ceremonial title from her name.

She was afraid, terribly afraid, he saw.

Her face had gone chalk-white and her vivid lips were almost gray, but her eyes were wide and steady, a little pleading, a little questioning.

"I—in sooth, I know not whether thou art sprite or devil," she replied through lips she strove to keep from trembling. "Say, wilt thou do me harm?"

"Of course not," he returned. "Why should I harm you?"

"Are not all devils——"

"What makes you sure that I'm a devil?" he broke in. "Antonio is evil, you know that. He affronted thee, and I chastised him for it. Did not the good Saint George defend the innocent against the wicked; did not Michael hurl rebellious angels out of heaven?"

"Soothly," she nodded as a trace of color crept back in her cheeks, "and Saint Martin was a soldier and a mighty man of war——"

"Well, then," he laughed, "you see you have no need to fear. I never harmed a woman in my life. Indeed," he added, warming to the subject of his magnanimity, "if it did not bite me first, I never harmed a fly!"

"But—but you gave me twenty *aves* and two *paters*—said upon my bare knees on the pleasaunce gravel, too—because I did befriend a little dog mine uncle's pages plagued. You said that Christians may not show a kindness to a soulless animal."

"I *did?*"

"Nay, marry, thou didst not!" she answered positively. "Fra Alberto gave that penance, but *thou'rt — not — Fra — Alberto!*"

Once more her lips were trembling, and he could see small shivers shake her slender frame, but she made no move to flee from him, and the frightened look in her blue eyes was half a plea, half invitation.

"Who thinkest thou I am?"

"A devil, certes, but a good and kindly devil who never harmed a woman or a fly—unless belike the fly hight Hursar or Antonio."

Frank and trusting as a child, she laid her hand in his and led him to the narrow lancet-window which looked out across the valley toward the city.

"They make high carnival in town tonight," she smiled invitingly across her shoulder. "Surely, none could think amiss of it if the lady Fulvia were to travel to the city in company with Fra Alberto, her confessor. The prioress of the convent of Saint Agnes is my kinswoman. I fain would visit her the night, and—if I tarried at the fair awhile, or lost my way amid the booths of mountebanks and conjurers"—for a breath she hesitated, then—"if a gentlewoman is not safe accompanied by a holy friar, certes, virtue has gone out of Christendom. Wilt come with me, Fra—Fra Diavolo?"

THE carnival was in full flower. Night was turned to day by strings of colored lanterns stretched from house to house across the streets. A pandemonium of pleasure, an orgy of jollity reigned. Reed pipes skirled, drums beat, tambourines clashed musically. A hundred booths displayed a hundred marvels. Apes danced to elfin music in the torchlight, conjurers and prestidigitators showed a skill which seemed inspired by the Evil One. Musk, attar, cinnamon and myrrh, frankincense and aloes were offered by a hundred swart-faced hawkers. Jongleurs and fire-eaters, rope-dancers and tumblers showed the marvels of their callings. A barber-chirurgeon drew teeth to the accompaniment of his victims' howls and the mingled jeers and applause of the crowd.

His cowl drawn close about his head, a black eye-mask across his face, Albert shuffled through the laughing, jostling

throng. At his side, arm linked in his, walked the lady Fulvia with a violet domino cloaked about her shoulders. She wore her hood drawn forward, and a mascaron of gold-hued tissue hid her features from such revelers as dared impudently to peer beneath the shadow of her capuch. More than once, attracted by the offerings of the fakirs, Albert would have made a purchase, but each time was a forcible reminder that friars' cassocks have no pockets, nor friars wherewithal to fill them even if they had.

At the interesection of two streets a crowd was gathered where a young girl, white and supple as a fresh-peeled willow withe in sateen trunks and silver breastlets, performed contortionistic feats. "San Marco, she hath ne'er a bone within her corse!" an idler swore as the little maid set hands and elbows on the floor, then raised her feet above her head and brought them slowly forward. "God's wounds!" another answered as the girl crossed supple legs above her shoulders and swung her feet before her laughing face; "methinks she is the very daughter of the snake that tempted Mother Eve!"

An ancient hag in flaunting colored rags and tarnished metal ornaments came sidling through the crowd and crept to Fulvia's side. Beneath her bell-crowned hat and headkerchief of gaudy cotton cloth her face was deeply bitten with the sun and with an intricate crisscross of wrinkles, but her eyes were shrewd and bright and bird-like. "Ah, pretty mistress," she besought in a shrill piping tone, "let me read your palm, let the gipsy tell the fortune that awaits you. Love and joy and length of days are surely yours, for you tread among the great folk. Yes," she added, advancing till she clawed at Fulvia's cloak, "you tread among the great folk, mistress, and surely the poor man is servant to the rich, and the borrower servant to the lender."

He could see the smile that curved the girl's lips underneath her mask, and wondered at its wistfulness as she laid her hand within the hag's dry claws and answered softly: "Nay, old mother, has it not been written that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap?"

"Ah-hee!" the aged beldame wheezed, "thou speakest rightly, mistress, for the watchers of the dead e'en now are numbering the tale, and some there are that dwell in mighty places who eftsoons shall hear the tolling of the passing bell."

She dropped the girl's white hand and hobbled off into the crowd, and in a moment her quaint head-dress vanished in the tide of parti-colored dominos.

"Mad?" Albert asked. "Meseemeth that her words lacked sense——"

Fulvia was drawing him away, the insistent pressure of her arm in his leading him farther and farther from the close-packed, lighted street. "Nay," she returned, and he could feel her tremble with excitement, or, perhaps, with fear, "there was a might of meaning in her words for those who understand."

They had left the milling, laughing crowd, and were standing at the stairhead of a landing where the darkened river crept between the blank-walled houses, its surface shining and unruffled as a sheet of tautly-stretched black satin.

"I must leave thee for a time, Fra 'berto," she said softly. "There are those with whom I must hold converse, and they have small liking for thy cloth."

"My cloth?" he echoed questioningly; then, with sudden understanding: "See here, you know that I'm no friar. You said I was a devil—yourself did name me Fra Diavolo. Why not take me with you?"

She considered him a moment, then impulsively put out her hands. "I had forgotten, Fra—Diavolo," she answered softly. "Thy cappuccio obscured thy face,

and I did not see thine eyes. Come, we have need of men of valor."

Turning toward the river she emitted a low, wailing call, and in a moment called twice more. Presently they heard a softly-splashing sound as a boat with muffled oars came toward them from the shadows. The rower glanced up challengingly at sight of Albert's hood and cassock, but a low word from the girl appeased him. " 'Tis but a mask," she whispered. "He will serve us faithfully."

"Whither go we?" Albert asked as their little boat slipped silently between the ranks of houses.

For a moment she made no reply; then, irrelevantly, "Dost see my shoon?" she queried, stretching out her slender, high-arched feet for his inspection.

They were the same shoes she had worn when he first saw her, heelless, pointed, light-cream colored, sewn with golden threads and appliqued with violet silk, tipped with incrustations of small sapphires. Glove-tight, they clung to her small feet, bringing into charming definition delicately arched instep and the outline of the slender toes that lay uncrowded like the fingers of a shapely hand.

"They are made of human skin," she told him; then, as though in explanation: "My uncle gave them to me."

"Human skin? Good Lord——"

"Nay, not so; a foully evil one, I ween."

"What mean ye?" Albert asked. She had crossed her knees, rested an elbow on the uppermost, and leant her chin upon a small clenched fist, staring out upon the murky waters with troubled, thought-filled eyes. At length:

"Mine uncle's farmerers and villeins groan beneath a yoke of tyranny more sore than any which the wicked Pharaoh pressed upon the Hebrew children," she said softly, almost musingly. "They reap the increment of little that they sow, the impost-gatherer despoils their barns, drives off their cattle, even takes the fowls from their door-step and the eggs from out the nest. Their daughters are made things of sport for men at arms, their children cry for bread, and if they ask for justice——" She raised her foot again, that he might better see the little shoe encasing it.

" 'Twas at lambing-time that Salvatore dared to lead the peasants to the castle for petition of redress. Mine uncle's stewards had gone through the farms and garnered in the young of sheep and goat, taking the dams of those too young to graze, and when the peasants raised their protest they were answered with the lash.

"Salvatore talked not of revolt; he believed the word of Holy Writ that the servant should be subject to his master. He only asked that of their flocks' increase the farmerers retain a quarter-part, rendering to my uncle three in four. With him came his mother and his wife, his sons and daughters, and a babe still at the breast.

"Mine uncle met them at the drawbridge head, surrounded by his guard. When Salvatore had completed his petition the Dalmatian butchers rushed upon him, and made captives of them all. His wife and mother and his little children—e'en the suckling babe—they drowned before him in the waters of the moat. His sons' heads they struck off and fixed upon their pikes. His daughters—*santissima, Maria!* 'twould have been far better had they shared their brothers' fate. The girls were four, mine uncle's guard hath half a hundred men. 'Twas very piteous to hear them scream with torment of lust-riven flesh.

"Next morning after matins they did sound the tocsin, and when the farmerers were come from all the country round,

mine uncle bade them watch and see what fate befell a rebel. Thereafter they dragged Salvatore forth, and in sight of all the people flayed him quick. 'Twas Hursar did the butcher's work, Hursar whom thou hast worsted in the fence today. Dost marvel that I bade thee slay him?

"Of Salvatore's skin they made a binding for the missal wherefrom thou readest—Fra Alberto reads the office of the Holy Mass in chapel. Moreover, they did fashion gloves thereof, to delight mine uncle when he rides amain upon the hunt. Also they made of it these shoon which mine uncle gave to me."

"But—the things are loathsome; I'd not wear them!" Albert blazed.

"Thou would'st, didst thou regard them as I do," she answered softly.

"Lord! You don't mean you *want* to wear 'em?"

"Yes. Soothly."

He gazed at her in horrified amazement, and her eyes were pleading, almost tender, as they met his look.

"Bethink thee," she leant forward and took up the crucifix that hung upon his rosary, "why do men revere this symbol of the gallows which our Lord was hanged upon?"

"As a memento of the sacrifice He made—I see! Forgive my lack of understanding! I had thought——"

"Many think as thou didst, Fra Diavolo. They say the lady Fulvia is cruel and pitiless; proud, cold and wanting in compassion."

The boat slipped silently along the darkened river; the whisper of its softly feathered oars and the muffled rhythm of the cloth-wrapped sweeps against their locks were all that broke the silence. Abruptly:

"Dost thou believe such things are right?" she asked. "Is it thy thought that one man, however high his birth, should have such power over others?"

"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," he quoted, and a thrill of pride of country mounted in him as he spoke.

Her blue eyes widened and a light like distant stars reflected in a quiet pool shone in them as she leant toward him.

"Say—say those words again!" she gasped. "Never have I heard their like. Not in all the writings of the fathers is such perfect gospel to be found! Teach me, dear devil, let me grave them on my heart: . . . all men are created equal . . . endowed by their Creator with the right to life and liberty! Whence come those tidings?"

"It is the profession of my people's faith," he answered. "Long years agone, when they threw off the yoke of tyranny, they took those words and others like them for the motto of their government."

"And in thy land do all men live by them?" she asked. "Hath none the right to say them nay? Thy king——"

"We have no king. In my land all the people rule. Except for crime, no man's inherent right to name his rulers can be taken from him, and every man is safe in goods and person. Each man's house is unto him a castle, however lowly it may be, and so strong a castle is it that though the rain and wind may enter, the greatest in the land durst not step unbidden through the door."

"O, sweet devil, dear Fra Diavolo, take me with thee to that happy land of thine!" she begged. "Maugre it be hell, there would I bide for ever. Say thou wilt take me with thee when thou dost return!"

"I cannot, child," he answered sadly. "Not only space, but time divides us."

"Then promise thou wilt stay and help remake this doleful world into a model of that country whence thou comest."

"That I cannot promise, either," he replied. "I am not the master of my fate."

"But thou would'st stay here with me, an 'twere given thee to choose?" She leant toward him, and the perfume of her hair was in his nostrils, the flutter of her breath upon his cheek.

"Stay?" Albert answered gaspingly, while his lungs seemed fighting for air like those of a spent swimmer almost worsted by the tide. "Stay, my dear? If I might have the choice, I'd hold time still for ever; I'd let heaven beg for me while I clung to earth by nothing stronger than a kiss!"

The violet hood had slipped back from her lustrous hair, and in the faintly glowing moonlight it shone like gilded silver. Her eyelids drooped until the heavy lashes made twin arcs of shadow on her cheeks, and her lips were slightly parted as she leaned toward him and turned her face up for his kiss. There was that in the utterness of her surrender, the total yielding up of self, that almost frightened him. But she was in his arms, her mouth was answering his with rapturous avidness, and her uncoifed perfumed hair a golden maze in which all hesitancy lost itself.

"My dear," he faltered, "my precious, my belovèd . . ."

"Dear devil, sweetest devil; my adorèd Fra Diavolo!" she whispered crooningly as she laid her head against his sackcloth-covered breast.

THEIR boat had beached upon a little shingle, and the oarsman rose and pushed against the sloping gravel with his sweep, holding the craft stationary. There was a little stretch of water between boat and sand, and Albert lifted Fulvia in his arms to bear her dry-shod to the strand. The tide was cool as though it gushed from mountain springs, and he shivered as he felt the coldness of the water wavering round his sandaled feet. The girl put up a hand and stroked his cheek.

"Art chilled, sweet devil?" she asked gently. "Then drink and be anwarmed," and with a little sigh she laid her lightly parted lips against his mouth.

Mist, faint as steam that simmers from a heating pot, was rising from the river, and as they made their way back from the beach they found themselves confronted by black darkness thickened with the drifting fog. More than once his feet were tangled in invisible obstructions, but the girl walked steadily ahead, her hand in his to guide him through the murk. Straining his eyes, Albert found that he could see a little way around him, but except by glimpses anything ten feet away was blotted out by swirling mists. At length they paused before a rustling iron grille which Fulvia opened with the surety of touch of an initiate, then led him swiftly down a flagstone path. To right and left he saw small huts of stone, some barred by gratings, some blank-faced in the gloom. Leafless poplars reached skeletons like stripped fishbones to the cloud-flecked sky; here and there a moldering granite shaft stood stark and lonely in a maze of briar-bushes.

"Where are we?" whispered Albert.

"The *campo santo.*"

"The *campo santo*—cemetery?"

"Yea, 'tis here the watchers of the dead assemble."

They approached a mausoleum larger than the rest, and as they reached its steps a hoarse voice challenged through the fog-bound gloom, and Albert saw the glimmer of a pike-blade. "Is not the

poor man servant to the rich, and the borrower servant to the lender?" asked the unseen sentry.

"Nay," answered Fulvia, "has it not been written that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap?"

The menacing steel withdrew into the clump of laurel bushes and they mounted the sepulchral stairs, pushed back the grille, and let themselves into a vaulted tomb. At the far end of the mortuary chamber was a well, down which there curved a stairway to the crypt-room underneath. Fulvia's soft-soled shoes whispered gently on the stones, but Albert's rawhide sandals seemed to wake a thousand echoes as he stumbled down the stairs.

About a flat-topped stone sarcophagus there grouped a little crowd, monstrous and misshapen-seeming as a crew of gnomes from Niflheim in the torchlight's smoky glare. As Fulvia and Albert entered, the leader of the group drummed on the coffin-top with a blanched thigh-bone and called:

"Have any cause to ask redress of injury?"

"I have," a masked form answered, rising from its seat beside the coffin.

"Who speaks?"

"Nicolo the farmerer, brother to the shepherd Salvatore."

"What dost thou charge?"

"Murder. Murder of my kinsman and his wife, his sons and suckling babe; defloration of his daughters, then their murder; all without just cause."

"Whom accusest thou?"

"Count Cristoforo di San Cologero, lord of the lands whereon my brother toiled, lord of the lands beyond the river, lord of the lands beyond the hills. Him I indict of murder, of him I ask redress of kinsman's blood, of women's tears, of maidens' ravished innocence!"

"Does any speak for Count Cristoforo di San Cologero?" asked the chairman of the junta.

Slowly, rhythmically, without hurry, without undue delay, he beat upon the coffin-lid with the thigh-bone. A deep, reverberant blow: "Matthew?" Another blow: "Mark?" A third drum-beat: "Luke?"

BEAT followed slow, deliberate beat, and after each the leader called the name of an Apostle. Finally, when twelve names, ending with Barnabas, had been called:

"Judas Iscariot?"

"Yea!" answered all the crowd in unison, and Albert heard the girl's clear treble mingle with the sullen voices of the men.

"Whence answers Judas for his client?"

"From hell, where they who shed the blood of innocents are prisoned."

A pause which lasted while a man might count a hundred followed; then:

"Have ye reached a judgment, Watchers of the Dead?"

"Aye!"

"What is your judgment?"

"Let him die the death!"

"How shall he die it?"

"By the draft."

"Who gives the potion?"

"I." Muffled in her domino, her face hidden by the golden mask, Fulvia stepped forward and put forth her hand.

"Thou'lt not falter?" asked the leader, while his eyes gleamed red in the torchlight through the peep-holes of his mask. "He is of thy blood——"

"Abel's blood cried out for vengeance from the earth; Salvatore's and his wife's and children's asks for justice from the land, and none will answer it. Give me the phial. I will keep mine oath, and God do so to me, and more, if I should fail my promise!"

Light flashed upon a little flask as it changed hands, and Fulvia hid it in her draperies.

"Watchers of the Dead," began the leader, but a strident cry cut through his words.

"Fly, fly!" the hail resounded through the tomb. "They are upon us—*i signori di notte*—the night-watch!"

"Here, friend, thou'lt find it useful, an thou knowest how to use it!" rasped a rough voice as a sword was thrust into Albert's hand. "Guard well the lady Fulvia; we'll lure the varlets from the shore, and thou should'st reach thy boat without mishap."

The masked men swarmed out of the chamber, and in a moment they heard shouts and clash of metal mingled with oaths fierce as heavy blows.

Albert tucked his cassock-hem inside his hempen girdle, and, sword in hand, began to climb the stairs with Fulvia at his heels. The sounds of conflict had grown dim among the graves, and they raced toward the cemetery gate, dropping now and then behind a ruined tombstone when combatants drew near them.

At the river's rim their boat lay beached, the rower leaning forward in his seat as though asleep.

"Thanks be to San Giorgio, we have won through them!" breathed Fulvia as they hastened to the boat. "Come, Messer Devil, we shall soon be—*Santo Dio!*"

From behind the gunwales of the boat rose two armed men, while the oarsman leaped up from his seat, cast his cloak aside, and revealed himself an armored *bravo*.

Albert swung the girl behind him, and as the *bravi* charged he leaned down and seized a handful of fine gravel from the beach. Before the leading *bravo's* blade could clash with his, he flung the sandy grit with all his might straight in the fellow's face, and as he howled with pain, drove at him with his sword. The point struck flesh, glanced upward on the man's cheek-bone, then sank in half a foot as, slipping past the bony ridge, it pierced the eye and lodged itself within the brain.

Cold air, chill as currents from the beating wings of death, fanned Albert's face as the second *bravo* struck at him, but with a quick turn he dodged the flailing blow, disengaged his blade and caught the other's sword upon its edge.

The very force of his opponent's charge bore Albert back, and he felt the breath go out of him as the brass cuirass collided with his chest. Bending backward, he struck out with all his force, bringing a left uppercut in contact with the soldier's hairy chin. There was a clicking as of castanets as the *bravo's* teeth snapped shut, and with a grunt he toppled back unconscious from the blow.

The third man was more wary. Refusing to accept the opening Albert seemed to offer as he raised his sword above his head, he advanced a gliding step or two, retreated quickly out of reach, then poised on guard, his sword held straight before him.

Albert made a feint, then a quick lunge, and as his adversary parried in quarte sank back upon his heel, executed a quick cut-over, and lunged straight at the *bravo's* throat. The brazen gorget topping the cuirass prevented his blade from running through the other's neck, but the force with which he struck unsteadied his opponent, and his point glanced upward, cut across the jugular, and left a red spate in its wake.

"Make haste!" he cried, seizing both of Fulvia's hands and swinging her across the little strip of water to the waiting boat. He picked up the oars and fitted them into the rowlocks.

The craft was clumsy, wide-beamed and flat-bottomed, but once he had it out

upon the stream it answered readily enough as he pulled at the sweeps.

"Which way lies town?" he asked. "I know not my directions. Thou must guide me."

HALF an hour later they were clamoring at the postern of the convent of Saint Agnes. When at last the sleepy portress answered their alarum she bestowed a single scornful glance on them and slammed the wicket.

"Get ye gone, ye vagabonds!" she shrilled. "San Antonio's curse upon ye rakes and trulls who play such knavish tricks o' nights!"

Her sandals clattered echoes of her righteous indignation as she shuffled down the passage, nor could all their ringing bring her back again.

"So that's the hospitality of Holy Church?" Albert asked sarcastically, but Fulvia laughed lightly.

"In good sadness, bold Sir Devil, meseems the reverent sister wardress had some cause for her suspicions," she assured him. "Look thou at me, and at thyself."

Her domino was rent to tatters by the briary bushes of the graveyard, and wet with river water. From her hood her unbound hair hung about her face and on her shoulders like a golden cataract; mold and cobwebs from the tomb adorned her with a hundred dusty festoons.

Albert had an even more grotesque appearance. His cassock was tucked in his belt and kilted to his knees; through his hempen girdle was thrust a long, bare sword; upon his head, cocked at a rakish angle, sat a brazen morion he had appropriated from a fallen member of the watch.

Laughter kindled in their eyes and gurgled in their throats as they finished their inspection of each other, but the seriousness of their plight stopped Albert's mirth.

"What shall we do?" he asked. " 'Tis six leagues to the castle, and there is no conveyance. The city swarms with vagrants and cutpurses. We cannot linger in the streets."

"There is a house I know, an old deserted villa," Fulvia replied, "but 'tis said the spirits of the damnèd dead walk there. Durst enter it?"

"Why not?" he laughed. " 'Twill be a roof above our heads, and the rabble will keep off for fear of ghosts. As for us, 'tis from the living, not the dead, we need protection."

Hand in hand they crept through the deserted street till they reached a wicket in a high, blank-faced stone wall. Fulvia pushed and pushed again, but the rusted gate refused to give, and it was not till Albert lent his strength to hers that they managed to bear back the grille.

The garden was a ghost of former glories. Rose bushes, overgrown and weedy, stretched out thorn-clawed arms to hold them back as they passed the broken trellises. The laurel arbor was an almost-submerged island in a rising tide of nettles; grass grew in the graveled paths; the marble statues toppled from their pedestals.

Stumbling through the weed-choked desert, they came at last to the house door, low and iron-studded. Albert put his shoulder to it, and with a groan as if in protest at the violence, the portal swung back slowly, and a long, dark corridor gaped at them.

Step by cautious step they felt their way along the passage till they reached a central hall. This was floored with black and white encaustic tiles, but here and there a slab was missing, and the orifices seemed to grin at them like tooth-holes gaping in the jawbones of a skull.

Through a window at the bend of the

grand stairway came a pallid shaft of moonlight which stained the dark with feeble luminance, giving half-seen articles of furniture a dim and ghastly outline more terribly suggestive than Cimmerian blackness.

The very house appeared resentful of their presence. Whispers seemed to follow and shadows flit behind them. Veiled eyes seemed on them constantly. Something evil seemed to stand beside their elbows, watching, invisible . . . waiting.

Albert drew his sword and folded his left arm around Fulvia's shoulders. "Don't let it get you down," he bade; then, as she turned questioning eyes on him: "Be not afraid. 'Tis nothing but the dark which daunts us."

Above the stairway were the chambers, and in one of these they found a place for her to rest. It was high-vaulted in the Lombard-Gothic style; the walls were hung with faded tapestries; medals, statuettes and amphoræ stood in dark-wood cabinets. Beneath a silken canopy, supported by gilt figures carved in olive-wood, loomed, dimly visible, a mighty bedstead.

With his folded sleeve he brushed the dust from silken counterpane and pillows; then, as Fulvia sat upon the high-piled mattress, he knelt before her and drew off her shoes. Her feet were just as he had visioned them, high-instepped, narrow-heeled, white as lilies and embroidered with a dainty tracery of violet veins. The nails were filbert-shaped and had the sheen of nacre. Yielding to temptation past endurance, he kissed the long straight toes that never had been bent by rigid shoes, and laid his cheek against the soft, pink soles.

"Could rest here till eternity is rolled up like a scroll and feast my heart upon thy worship, sweetest devil," the girl whispered, "but thou art languished, and the day holds much for thee." With a sigh she drew her feet reluctantly within her robe and stowed her shoes inside the wide sleeves of her overmantle, then held her arms up to him. "One kiss, belovèd devil, ere we say good-night," she murmured.

In the chamber next to Fulvia's, Albert fought for wakefulness. The empty house was charged with menace; he must stay awake to guard her . . . what was that little bottle she received in the tomb . . . wonder what the fellows in the trust department would say if they could see him in this get-up . . .

A wild, shrill scream, a cry that seemed more filled with madness than with fright, ripped through the gossamer of dream that shrouded him. *Fulvia!*

Sleep-dazed, he stumbled toward the doorway of her room and kicked the leather curtain from his path.

The chamber blazed with light. A dozen forms as hideous as the figments of a nightmare gathered round the girl, who crouched in panic on the floor. Several of them flourished torches, and in their flare he saw the sickening horror of them. Some were partly masked, but where the vizards slipped away he saw that they were skull-faced—fleshless. Some had lost a hand, and brandished rotting stumps of wrists aloft; one or two danced maniacally upon a single leg, and the air was filled with a foul stench that made his stomach retch.

"The pretty one has come to dwell with us!" they chanted with a skirl of hideous glee. "Clean flesh has come among us—sweet, clean woman-flesh!"

One of them reached out a putrefying stump of hand as if to stroke her cheek, and at the gesture Fulvia groveled on the floor as though she fain would press herself into the tiles, and her scream trailed off to soundlessness with very shrillness.

Here were the "spirits of the damnèd

dead" who walked the ancient villa. Lepers!

Albert charged in silence, lips closed against the nauseating fetor of the room. His sword sheared through the first skull which it struck as though it were a rotten pumpkin, and he wrenched it loose while blood and mangled brains gushed out upon the foul wrappings of the leper's head. Swift as forked lightning, his lunging blade stabbed down two others of the girl's tormenters, and as a fourth one clawed at him with unclean, scale-flecked hands, he dashed the pommel of his weapon straight into the festering face and felt the rotting flesh give way like putrid fruit.

With skirling squeaks, more like the squealing of a rat than any sound from human throat, the ghastly crew dashed from the room, and Albert bent and took the swooning girl into his arms.

Sword poised before him, he marched through the darkened halls until he came upon the entrance they had forced. Kicking the door open he bore her to the laurel arbor and set her gently on the grass.

"Nay, sweetest devil, dearest Fra Diavolo, put me not from out thine arms, I do beeseech thee," Fulvia moaned. "Hold me close, my love; clasp me in thy bosom as the husk may hold the fruit till tonight becomes tomorrow. Am terribly afraid."

Dawn was blushing in the east before she slept, and the convent bells had rung for tierce before she woke.

"Good morrow, Fra Diavolo," she smiled up in his eyes; then, suddenly remembering the horror of the night: "Oh, let us go, sweet fiend," she begged. "Am terrified of this unhallowed place. E'en with thee standing by to guard, it likes me not."

Hand in hand they left the ruined garden of the living dead.

The gnomon on the castle sun-dial shadowed III before they reached the drawbridge head. The way across the valley and the heights had been a weary one, and Albert had been forced to carry Fulvia for much of it; for her soft-soled shoes were no protection on the rock-strewn roads, and she wearied quickly in the day's fierce heat. A cotter gave them bread and goat's milk for their noonday meal, and the last three leagues they traveled on a franklin's stoneboat. Everywhere, he noticed, farmerer and peasant, boor and villein greeted Lady Fulvia as though she were a saint come down from Paradise to walk amongst them, and though they looked on him with surly questioning at first, the fact that she was with him seemed to quiet all suspicion.

"There is bed room in the vestry, an thou carest to rest," she told him as they parted by the chapel door. "Sleep well, my sweet *diabolus*. Will see thee at the board."

He found a corded cot hid in an alcove of the vesting-room, and a jug of water and a ewer on a bench. Cleansing himself as best he could with this, and wiping on a cotta for want of proper towel, he flung himself upon the bed and slept until a trembling page came tiptoeing to bid him to the banquet board.

A thousand candles made the vaulted banquet hall almost as bright as day, and on the long and narrow tables gleamed horn lanterns and copper lamps and tapers. Laurel branches had been massed about the great high table on the dais where the puissant Count Cristoforo di San Cologero sate in state before the bright-hued Flemish tapestry depicting Lazarus at the gate of Dives, and on the board a fair white cloth was spread; but on the common tables there was room for no such frivolous trappings, for al-

ready they were overheaped with food and dishes.

As Count Cristoforo entered, musicians in the minstrels' gallery made harmony with flageolet and hautboy, viol and drum, and as he took his seat a stream of waiters entered from the kitchen. Platters and bowls of larks and lampreys, capons and pheasants, ducks, geese and peacocks, carp, salmon, ox-heads, pigs'-heads, calves'-brains, venison and pork, mutton and beef, came in endless order, and comfits, sweetmeats, marchpane, came between. Last of all came wines and possets, and in jugs of earthenware the stronger drinks that stole the wits away and loosed the tongues.

At the center of the table stood a great gilt dish of salt, and just above this they made room for Albert.

Men at arms and gentlemen, scribes and clerks, stewards and intendants with their womenfolk gathered at the common tables, and the noise of laughter, conversation and the gusty appetites they brought to their food was well-nigh deafening. Everyone, it seemed, clerk, guard, steward and lady, talked at the top of his ability. Listeners there were none.

At the table on the dais sate Count Cristoforo, Lady Fulvia, the lord Antonio and a sallow, dark-haired man whose somber fur-trimmed robe, no less than his demeanor of great gravity, labeled him a doctor learnèd in the law.

Cristoforo was a mountain of a man. Great-paunched, with three chins folding on his throat beneath his bristling beard, his vein-encrusted cheeks hung down like the dewlaps of a hound, and his pudgy hands, braceleted with rings of fat, were large enough to close around a capon as an ordinary hand might compass a roast pigeon. He laughed much and talked loudly, making up by boisterous gayety for the reticence of his companions.

Fulvia was proud, cold, silent and aloof, eating with a daintiness which showed small appetite for the rich food the servants brought. Not once did she vouchsafe a glance at her companions.

Antonio wolfed food greedily, but as he ate he never took his burning eyes from Fulvia's clear profile.

The lawman, as became his dignity, partook of food and drink in learnèd silence, but that he lacked in neither appetite nor thirst was proven by the nimbleness required of the page who served him.

When the feast had lasted some two hours, and the drinking, singing and unseemly jesting had become uproarious, Count Cristoforo rose and beat upon the table with his dagger-hilt.

"My friends," he roared as soon as something like a lull succeeded the wild hubbub, "we are gathered here tonight to drink success unto a union of two branches of our family. This night the lady Fulvia, my niece and ward, becomes affianced bride of Lord Antonio Giovanni di Verniatti, my well-belovèd heir and kinsman. Drink—drink to their bridal, and a long line of descendants to perpetuate our race!"

Fulvia's eyes were on him, cold as inlaid eyes of stone in a face of carven ivory, as he raised the chalice of chased silver brimming with red wine, and drained it at a draft.

He wiped his thick lips on his sleeve and held his cup out for replenishment. "And now a toast to the fair bride-elect, the fairest flower of all Tuscany——" he shouted, but stopped upon a hiccup, and a look of consternation spread across his bloated face. "San Michele!" he cried in a voice gone thin with terror—an absurdly small voice to come from such a barrel of a throat—"I am envenomed!"

He leaned against the table, both hands clasped across his bulging paunch, eyes bulging from his livid face. Great beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead and rolled down his hairy cheeks, his eyes shone with a glassy luster, and his yellow teeth protruded from his writhing lips. A cry, half bellow, half despairing groan, came from his gaping mouth, and he slipped down to the floor, clutching at the air with distraught fingers.

"Misericordia!" he shrieked. *"Misericordia, domine!"*

His cries were muted to low muttering groans, and he sprawled face-downward on the rug-strewn floor, fingers twitching. "Fulvia!" he rolled upon one shoulder, and in his glazing eyes shone realization. "Thou said'st that God would give me blood to drink when I flayed Salvatore! Didst thou — didst thou give me——" With a final tremor he lay still, eyes gazing sightlessly up at the girl, jaw fallen, swollen, purpled tongue protruding from his mouth.

"Seize that woman!" Like a whip-crack Lord Antonio's words rang through the room.

Albert leaped up from his seat as a score of guardsmen sprang to do the new count's bidding.

Hursar, the Dalmatian he had worsted yesterday, stood in his path, and he struck out savagely, felt his fist collide with the man's jaw and saw him stumble back against the table. By the guardsman's clutching hand there stood an earthen bowl of half-cooled mutton broth, and with an oath he seized the vessel and raised it overhead to hurl its scalding contents into Albert's face.

Steam was streaming from the bowl. It rose in ever-thickening clouds, spreading like a mist across the flickering points of candlelight, blotting out the objects in the room.

Albert spread his hands to sweep the vapor from his eyes, clutched out blindly, and touched—the edge of his own pearwood kidney-desk.

Sunlight slanted through the windows with their hangings of Calcutta print, picking up the muted reds and blues and ochers of the antique Persian carpet, bringing out the highlights in his mother's portrait, framed above the mantelpiece. Five steps it took to cross between the window and his desk; he had started from the window when the mist had first seemed to obscure his eyes as he looked into the little globe. . . . The globe? He glanced down at his hand. There it was, a little sphere of crystal, three inches in diameter; in its center stood a tiny house with grouping, battlemented towers and a castellated roof. In the background, almost microscopically small, showed the spires and roofs of a walled town.

"Fulvia!" he called. "Where are you, dear? I'm coming . . . they shan't take you . . ."

The mocking, wailing laughter of fire-apparatus sirens bidding all and sundry clear the way, drifted through the opened windows from the street. Faint, but understandable, a newsboy's hail came through the summer afternoon: "Extry poiper! Read all about that big poison plot!"

He was home; home in New Rochelle. This was the Twentieth Century.

And Fulvia? Fulvia stood surrounded by her enemies, separated from him by three thousand miles of ocean and—*seven hundred years!*

"NONSENSE, son, it was as plain a case of self-induced hypnosis as I've ever seen! Every favorable element was present—the bright, globular object to concentrate attention, the sun's rays focused by the crystal, the suggestion of a mediæval atmosphere by that castle in the ball—everything. Why, you need no fur-

ther proof than that the whole forty hours compassed by your dream were crowded into the little time it took you to walk five steps." Doctor Bainbridge, plump, florid and white-haired, drew the Russian leather case from the upper left-hand pocket of his white waistcoat, snapped his oxford glasses open, adjusted them with care, and began to scribble a prescription.

"Here we are," he announced; "just a little iron, quinine and strychnin. Take it regularly three times every day, and you'll soon be fit again."

"I don't see how it could have been hypnosis, self-induced or otherwise," objected Albert. "Lord knows I've tried to capture it again. I've held the globe exactly as I did that afternoon, even timed myself, so the sun would be precisely in the same position, and looked and looked in it, but—nothing's happened. I've *got* to get back to her, Doctor. I must, I tell you! The memory of her face as those soldiers closed on her, that terrible smile with which Antonio regarded her—they drive me crazy!"

"Easy on, son," soothed the doctor. "I'm not particularly surprized you've not been able to repeat the auto-hypnotism. Things like that are generally accidents. You were ripe for it that afternoon, that's all.

"See here, let's say you're normally not allergic to milk, beef, eggs or beer—most people aren't. But if a proper combination of physical circumstances develops, so that you have what laymen call a bilious condition, any one of 'em will make you sick as a tinker's dog. I've seen you finish four old-fashioneds in a row and never bat an eye; yet you know there are times when a single Scotch and soda seems to go to your head like a stratosphere balloon. It's all a case of physical condition, boy. That afternoon last week you were tired, nervously or physically exhausted, or something you'd eaten for luncheon had failed to digest properly, thus keeping a greater supply of blood than normal in the region of the stomach and intestines and away from the brain—any one or all of a dozen different things might have contributed to put you into exactly the condition necessary for hypnosis to develop.

"Judging from your description, I'd say you suffered from a kind of nightmare under auto-hypnotic anesthesia."

"But, Doctor," Albert argued, "it can't have been a dream. Dreams, whether we have 'em in sleep or hypnosis, are predicated on our waking knowledge, aren't they? I'm assistant trust officer at the Consolidated; it wouldn't be possible for me, with my background, to dream out the complexities of a television outfit, would it?"

"H'm; hardly," Doctor Bainbridge answered.

"Then," Albert flashed triumphantly, "I couldn't have dreamed this! I've never been to Italy; I knew nothing of Thirteenth Century costumes or customs; I never attended service in a Catholic church, and I surely never saw a leper; yet you tell me everything I described was photographically accurate. How could I possibly have dreamt these things for which I had no apperceptive basis? No, Doctor, it won't do. I'm convinced I've had a vision of the past, perhaps a flash of ancestral memory.

"Psychologists tell us we never really forget anything, that every experience an individual has, from earliest infancy, leaves a complete, detailed and indelible record on his mnemonic apparatus. Something that has happened—some word, some scene—is apparently completely erased from memory; then, years later, maybe, associational paths previously blocked or covered over are suddenly and swiftly cleared, and in an instant that for-

gotten memory stands out in complete and clear detail. That's so, isn't it?"

"Of course," said Doctor Bainbridge, "but we're talking of the individual, now——"

"Quite so, but if these seemingly impossible flashes of buried memories are observable in individuals, why should it not be possible—certainly, it's no more strain on our credulity to believe it!—that the ancestral experiences of every individual are engraved in detail on his memory, and just as his own experiences can be brought up from the file-rooms of the subconscious, if the proper associational combination can be found, so in a proper case, his ancestral memories may be evoked?

"Let's put it another way: Let's say we're in a rowboat, going down a high-banked, widening river. We're unfamiliar with the stream above the point where we started, the banks and windings shut it from our view. That's the situation of the average man; it was mine until the other day. Now, suppose an aviator comes along, and takes us on his plane. The moment we rise high enough, we have a view of all that portion of the stream we've traveled, and *all that went before,* as well. We're able to see over the barriers of banks and turns, we're in position to——"

"See that part we haven't traveled yet, as well," broke in the doctor with a laugh. "It's an ingenious theory, son, but it's too far-fetched. I know the arguments about ancestral memory, but I've yet to see a demonstration of 'em. Some of our super-physicists contend that since it's light that makes it possible for images to be recorded through the camera of the eye, every action that occurred since time began is photographed on the light-rays, just as if it were imprinted on a film. Then they go a step farther, and assert that once the light-rays bounce off our planet they continue traveling through interstellar space eternally. According to their theory, then, if one possesses a powerful enough telescope, he only needs to train it off in space to witness the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum, or the Crucifixion. Ingenious, but nonsensical; utterly nonsensical. We've enough signs and wonders which are scientifically demonstrable without flying off on metaphysical tangents.

"What you need" — his manner dropped informal friendliness and became once more professional—"is more rest and exercise. That job of assistant trust officer in a bank as big as the Consolidated is too great a strain for any kid of thirty-two. Take six months' leave of absence. Get out in the air and think more about your golf and tennis scores and less about estates and wills and trusts. There'll be plenty of time for that when your liver begins to soften and your arteries get hard."

EVERY afternoon at three Albert stood before his study window with the little globe.

"Fulvia!" he would whisper hoarsely, "I'm trying to come back across the years to you. Help me, dear!"

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday he strove in desperation to pass the fast-shut gate to yesterday; Thursday, Friday, Saturday he strained in agony against unyielding panels of a door that had no key.

Sunday afternoon it happened.

He had been gazing in the crystal for some twenty minutes when he saw it slowly change in color. Its limpid depths shaded to a bottle-green, then to an intense, opaque blackness, like a lump of polished carbon. An icy wind seemed blowing on him. He had that eery, half-numbed feeling which a restless sleeper knows when the pre-dawn cold comes

through the opened windows and reaches for him through the blankets with chill fingers. Curiously, he felt light, intangible, imponderable, as though he were a wraith that drifted helpless in the shifting currents of the air.

All was dark about him, dark with the clammy dampness of a long-forgotten, fast-sealed tomb, or the blackness of an oubliette. When he put out his hands to right or left he touched cold, sweat-damped stone, his feet slid over dank, slick tiles; but, strangely, he did not appear to walk; rather, he seemed to float unhindered and unweighted through the gloom.

The clank of iron-shod feet came rattling down the corridor, and he saw the bloody stain of torchlight in the darkness as a squad of pikemen bearing flambeaux marched at quick-step through the gloom. By the luminance they brought he could see that the passageway lacked width to let them by, and he shrank against the wall to give them room, but they never slackened step as they approached, nor, though their torchlight must have shone upon him, did any of them vouchsafe any notice of his presence.

"Tramp — tramp — tramp; thump — thump—thump," their armored feet beat on the stones. They were close enough to touch him, they had come abreast of him—they had passed.

They had marched right through him with no greater realization of his presence than if he had been air. And he—he put his hands up to his brow to hold his reeling wits in place—had felt no sense of contact as their bodies passed through his!

Beyond the turn of the black passageway a little rivulet of light flowed out beneath an iron-studded door. He seized the ring-bolt at its lock in both his hands and pulled with all his strength, but he might as well have tugged at the masonry in which the door was set. Three times he strove to draw the barrier back, then, exhausted, leaned against it with a sigh of weariness. It was as if the panels melted at his touch. Without resistance he walked through the four-inch, iron-strapped oak planks and found himself in a low chamber.

The room was hung with black; black carpet on the floor, black tapestries upon the walls. On a dais stood a long table with a covering of black. Behind the table sat a row of seven men, all gowned and hooded in black baize, their somber cloaks and masks seeming to melt into the black background of the room. The only spots of color were the shifting pools of bloody light which flickered from the red-glass lamps upon the table, and the violet and golden hues of Fulvia's gown and mantle.

ERECT and proud as Sophonisba before Scipio she faced the masked inquisitors while one read her accusation from a parchment scroll:

"That the Lady Fulvia Maria Calvia di Gradenigo did maliciously and wickedly, moved thereto by temptation of the Devil, administer to her kinsman and liege lord, the mighty and right worshipful Count Cristoforo di San Cologero, a poisoned draft distilled by witchery, whereof the mighty and right worshipful Count Cristoforo aforesaid did die in mortal agony.

"That the Lady Fulvia Maria Calvia di Gradenigo aforesaid, not having the fear of God before her eyes, did wickedly, sinfully and iniquitously consort, foregather and cohabit with a demon incubus who had sacrilegiously and most impiously assumed the form and habit of the good and holy Fra Albertus, her chaplain and confessor . . ."

"What say ye to the crimination, Lady Fulvia?" the clerk asked when the long

list of her evil deeds had been recited.

A door was lightly opened back of the black tapestry, and Antonio tiptoed softly to the central figure at the table and whispered earnestly into his ear.

The masked inquisitor listened silently, then nodded in assent.

"Lady Fulvia, my cousin and aforetime promised wife," Antonio turned from the hooded judge and smiled at her, "I have prayed this worshipful tribunal to have clemency, and am authorized to tell you that an thou wilt confess thy guilt and spare them the great pain of putting you to torture, thou shalt not suffer pain from either steel or iron, fire or hemp, neither shalt thou be imprisoned long, nor suffer banishment or immolation in a cloister. Dost consent?"

Fulvia raised a creamy shoulder in disdainful shrug. "Why, certes, sith I am condemned aforehand, what boots it if I make acknowledgment?" she answered.

"And when didst thou become aware this demon who assumed a holy form and habit was no man?" the president of the tribunal asked while the scratching of the clerk's quill pen was like the rasping of a file on iron as he wrote the deposition down.

"When I saw him overman the butcher Hursar at the chapel entry I was sure he was not Father Albertino," she replied; "then, when my cousin and affianced husband yonder did force himself into my bower and affront me with foul slanders, this seeming Fra Alberto bade him eat his words, and when he would not, overcame him with as little travail an he were an unbreeched lad."

"In sooth, he did what never natural man hath done," Antonio broke in sneeringly.

"Then, when we were beset by leprous outcasts, he fended me right worthily, and——"

"And thou didst spend the nighttime in his company, alone?" the president asked. His voice was smooth and deep; kindly, reassuring in its tone.

"Yea——"

"And thou didst give him——"

"Naught but my lips and feet to kiss, I swear it."

"Thy *feet?*"

"Yea, he worshipped me——"

"Enough! Thou madest thyself a queen and goddess among devils! Hast added blasphemy to other crimes. Sign thy confession, harlot!"

The quill pen scratched as she laboriously spelt her name out on the sanded parchment.

"This is thy true and full confession, made of thy free will, without constraint or mental reservation?" asked the president.

"Thou sayest it."

A rustle of black draperies as the hooded arbiters arose and eyed her ominously through the peep-holes of their masks.

"Our sentence, then, is this," the deep voice of the president seemed to swell and fill the little, low-ceiled chamber till the very sable draperies fluttered with its force; "the judgment of this court is that the Lady Fulvia Maria Calvia di Gradenigo be exposed naked in the marketplace and stoned with stones until she dies. Thereafter her body shall be burnt to ashes and those cast in the river, that her sinful flesh may never find a resting-place where Christian dead are buried.

"Look to her, jailer!"

A sable tapestry was swept aside and a door creaked on its unoiled hinges. Half a dozen men at arms marched in and lined themselves each side of Fulvia.

They led her into the adjoining room, where the executioner, arrayed in scarlet hose and doublet, with a scarlet mask across his face, stood with two masked helpers.

They stripped her sumptuous garments

off and clothed her in the short, coarse-linen shrift of the condemned. They fastened manacles upon her wrists and gyves upon her tender ankles; last of all they riveted an iron carcanet around her neck and latched an ell-long chain to it. Thus, chained and collared like a savage beast, she stood to wait their pleasure.

"By the belly of Saint Jude," swore Hursar, who was in command of the guards' squad, as Fulvia's creamy body shone with ivory luminance against the murky darkness of the dungeon, "there's a dainty morsel for a lusty man, albeit too frail for much endurance!"

"Hold thy peace, thou hell-born devil's spawn, or by the Mass thou'lt feel the nip of red-hot pincers!" cried the executioner; then, very gently as he took her collar-chain to lead her from the room: "Art ready, lady?"

TETHERED by her neck-chain to a ring-bolt in the floor, Fulvia crouched upon the molding, verminous straw which strewed her dungeon. Her shackle was too short to permit her to sit upright, and the heavy bracelets and leg-irons bruised her tender flesh with each attempt at movement. "Ah, Fra Diavolo, dear, dear demon, where art thou now?" she sobbed. "Hast thou, too, deserted me in this dark hour?"

With a strain that seemed to wrench his soul asunder, Albert forced an answer: "I am here, belovèd."

His words were scarcely louder than the whisper of a breeze across a field of standing grain, but she heard them.

"Diabolus?" she called. "Art here, my love? I cannot see thee."

"I cannot see myself," he answered. "I seem discarnate."

"Art—art dead?" she asked. "Do devils die like mortals?"

"Nay, dearest, I am living," he replied, "but——" With an effort like the struggle of a sleeper to shake off the incumbrance of a nightmare, Albert thrust himself toward her. The air seemed almost solid; he had to battle with it as he might have struggled through the breakers when the surf was running high, but by sheer determination he forced himself across the dungeon's filthy floor. And as he fought he felt his strength increasing; by the time he reached her side he had attained a sort of visibility. Faint as a figure on a screen projected by a dull and flickering light he was, but still there was a tiny substance to his shadow, and when he reached his hands to her she felt them on her cheeks.

"Ah—ah," her breath came quickly between fluttering lips. "I feel thy touch, dear devil! Draw closer, fold me in thine arms, hold my head against thy heart and let me dream away that little that is left of life encompassed by thy love!"

He crouched beside her on the stinking straw and took her in his spectral arms.

She held her mouth up for his kiss, and though it was no more than a mere breath of air upon her lips, she shuddered with delight at it.

"Ah, love, dear love," she whispered, "when first I brought thee to my bower and looked into thy gentle eyes, my very heart took flight to thine, like a little bird that to its nest returns at eventide." And she twined her arms about him, very gently, lest they break his shadow-shape, and kissed him on the mouth, the cheek, the throat, the tonsured head.

And "sweetness of the honeycomb, delight of eyes and fairest among women," he named her. "Rose of gold, and tower of ivory, most beautiful of all God's creatures," and other lover-like endearments he breathed into her ear while he fought against the impotency of his unsubstantialness and sought to strain her to his bosom.

"Hear the singing of my heart, sweet

devil," she commanded, and held his head against the little breasts that lifted her coarse-linen shrift. "Hearest thou the tune it sings? Di-abo-lus, di-abo-lus; 'tis thy dear appellation which it beat since first I saw thee; 'tis thy sweet name 'twill call tomorrow, when — when ——" A shudder stopped her words, for she was young, and death was very dreadful.

And Albert kissed her hands, her brow, her neck, her feet, and last of all her eager, yearning mouth.

"Art thou in hell?" she asked at length, when they were surfeited with kisses. "Shall I join thee there tomorrow?"

"Nay, love, I do not bide in hell, at least not in the kind thou meanest."

"Where is thy dwelling, then?"

"In a land across the sea which takes its name from famed Atlantis, a land no one now living has yet dreamt of."

"Toward the sinking sun?"

"Yea, westward; separated from thee by three thousand miles of ocean and a septuple of centuries."

"O, heaven! Time and space alike are barriers between us!" wailed Fulvia. "But love is stronger; love will lead us to each other. Promise thou wilt wait for me, dear devil!"

"Through time and through eternity I'll seek thee," he returned, "and never will I give my love to any other."

So, clasping mouth to mouth and heart to heart, they crouched there on the dungeon's fetid straw till daylight marked a little square of cross-barred luminance against the window.

A GREAT stake had been set up on the execution platform in the market-place, and to this they conducted her.

As the double file of men at arms tramped from the fortress with the prisoner in their midst the city folk and countrymen fell to their knees and a chant went up to heaven: "*Miserere mei, Domine*—have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness, according to the multitude of Thy mercies . . ."

The headsman, in red, sleeveless doublet, his face concealed by a red mask, struck the shackles from her hands and feet, but left the iron collar round her neck; for by the chain attached to this she must be tethered to the stake, like a bear chained to its post for baiting.

Kneeling on the stones as he removed the gyves, the fellow mumbled: "It is not I who does this thing to thee, my lady, but the orders of the great ones of the church and state. Prithee, forgive a humble man who does his bounden duty, and remember me when thou comest to thy happy place."

"Nay, dost not know that I am excommunicate?" she smiled upon him sadly. "What service could the prayers of such as I do thee?"

"Nathless, lady, I had rather have thy prayers than the orisons of fifty tonsured priests," he answered. "Sith Holy Mass may not be said for thy repose, the prayers of every humble home throughout the city and the countryside shall rise for thee tonight, and every night thereafter. Pray thou for us sinful men, my lady!"

"Why, then, good boor, I will," she promised. "If it so be that prayers are made in that place where I go, know that mine shall rise for thee."

He pressed the edge of her coarse shrift against his lips, then, since time crowded, took his iron shears and slit the cloth from hem to throat, and with a quick jerk freed her body of it.

She stood exposed before the people in her slender beauty, her slim and boyish thighs, her little breasts that hung like raindrops on a window-pane, and the virginally-low swelling rondure between.

"Take up the stones!" It was Antonio's voice that called the order, but from

somewhere in the crowd a counter-order rang:

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her!"

A murmur of assent, low, but ominous and menacing as the rumble of approaching thunder, swelled among the throng, and several of the hardier pushed against the leveled pikes that framed the hollow square about the execution platform.

"Make haste!" Antonio bade. "The louse-bit rabble murmurs. Have done with it!"

Hursar and two others laid their halberds by and swaggered toward the platform.

Now that Death grinned in her eyes, her valiant spirit quailed. "Help, Fra Diavolo, pity me!" she cried. "Succor me——"

The impact of a cobble on soft flesh smashed her plea half uttered. Possibly the fellow meant it for a mercy-stroke; more probably his pent-up spite propelled the missile as Hursar hurled a fist-size stone into her stomach-pit.

Her agony was dreadful to behold. Eyes glazed and starting from her face, mouth squared with ghastly pain, she doubled forward as the great stone struck her solar plexus, and her hands beat impotently against the air as she gasped and fought for breath.

The aim of Hursar's fellow was more merciful. Drawing back his hand he hurled a flint which caught her on the temple, cutting through the blue-veined flesh and smashing the thin bone. There was a rattle of the rusty chain that held her to the stake, her knees bent flaccidly, and she hung unconscious and inert against the iron collar.

Thud followed thud as stone on stone was hurled. The lovely arms lost shape as their fragile bones were broken by the battering cobblestones. The tapering legs were twisted lengths of formless flesh. In half an hour all was finished, and the sweet white body which was Fulvia had been flailed into a bloody, shapeless mass that bobbed and twitched and bounced grotesquely on its chain as men at arms and some few heartless townsmen tried their aim on it.

Albert struggled like a maniac against the obstacle of formlessness. He tried to shield her body with his own. The stones passed through him without hindrance, nor could he feel their passage. He sought to seize a fallen stone and hurl it at the grinning Hursar or the cold malevolent Antonio. The rubbles might have weighed a ton, for all his puny efforts counted. Strive as he would, he could not budge one from the ground.

At last, by a supreme effort, he managed to grasp one in his clutching fingers. Slowly, while he fought down torturing weariness, he raised it, poised it for the throw, hurled it straight at Hursar.

The force that he expended overbalanced him. He fell face-downward as he flung the missile, struck the ground and lay there panting, sick with effort and exhaustion.

Slowly, lethargically, his eyes opened. He was lying on his study floor. Beside him, smashed to fragments, was the little crystal globe of memories. The gateway to the past was closed irrevocably.

A YEAR of lonely living had wrought great change in Albert Montagu. His curling hair was flecked with gray, at the temples it was white. His face showed lines of suffering, and his eyes were the eyes of one who watches by the corpse of happiness.

Nothing but the fact that he had known the bridegroom since they sported their first knickerbockers had induced him to forsake his hermit-like existence and attend the Trotter-Dorsay wedding.

A hundred times he wished he had not come.

The ceremony had been held upon the lawn, and the bridesmaids had been coolly lovely in pale pastels.

Now he stood alone beside a garden hedge, wondering how soon he could depart in decency. The murmur of a girlish conversation did not tend to lessen his discomfort:

"That's Albert Montagu. Stunning, isn't he, with that thin, stern face and prematurely gray hair? They say he had a disappointment in love and——"

"I saw him get a disappointment when he came," the other girl broke in. "Just as he was getting from his car his hat blew off, and the car behind ran over it. I'll bet he was mad! There's nothing quite as funny as a high hat when it's mashed——"

"Oh, look, there's Anne Bartholomew! Talk about your proud, cold, haughty queens! That girl's Mary Stuart and Medea rolled into one."

Idly, Albert looked across the lawn and felt a sudden tightening in his throat.

Tall, willowy, aloof and proud as Lucifer's half-sister she appeared, but so beautiful that he was fairly breathless at the sight of her. She wore a violet tunic-coat of marquisette, and under it a daffodil-hued gown of airy organdy. Her hair was bright as new-strained honey, and her face as pale as Parian marble, save for the scarlet line of pomegranate-red mouth. Beneath long, tapering brows her eyes were clear and blue as August skies; the line of her narrow, arrogant chin was perfect as she turned her face aside a moment. The youthfulness of her slight body shone resplendent through her garments, like a pale, hot flame that shines through polished ivory.

"Fulvia!" he choked, and in ten strides had crossed the lawn and stood before the girl.

Anne Bartholomew looked with cool, inquiring eyes at this young man who called her a strange name. Obviously, he was not one of those who had made too many visits to the punch bowl; quite as obviously, he was a gentleman.

"I'm sorry, I don't seem to know you. Have we met before?"

"Seven hundred years ago——"

Her slim, patrician brows arched slightly. He had been drinking, after all.

"Fulvia! You must—you can't say you've forgotten Diabolus—Fra Diavolo . . ."

"Fra Diavolo?" A small frown furrowed her smooth forehead. She hesitated for a moment, and in her eyes there came the look of one who seeks to capture a lost chord of music or a snatch of half-remembered verse. "Diabolus . . . I seem . . . a chapel . . ."

"And Hursar . . . and Antonio!" he added breathlessly.

"A carnival?" Still doubtful, she seemed groping through a buried treasure-house of memory.

"The meeting in the tomb . . . the fight with the *signori di notte* . . ."

"Wasn't there an old house, a deserted mansion?" Something like fear stirred in her calm eyes.

"And that ancient bedroom . . . your little feet . . ."

"A—a stake set up in the town square?" Mounting terror, recollection of a dream so dreadful that it chilled the summer sunshine, swept across her face, but:

"Remember that night in the dungeon, dear," he pleaded. "You said, 'Promise thou wilt wait for me, dear devil,' and——"

"You said, 'Through time and through eternity I'll seek thee, and never will I give my love to any other!' "

"Fulvia!"

"Sweet devil—dearest Fra Diavolo!"

Hand clasped in hand they faced each other, and in their eyes there shone reflection of the breaking dawn in Paradise.

"I say, Montagu, I've found something that belongs to you, and had it mended!" Mr. Trotter, bulging with officiousness and fairly fizzing with champagne, came up to them, a newly ironed silk hat extended in his pudgy, well-kept hand.

But Anne and Albert—Fulvia and Fra Diavolo—took no notice.

They had found something that belonged to them—and it was mended.

Dead Singer

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

He is gone
  Like the ghost of the dew on the mountain,
Like the dawn
  That gleamed a red flame on the fountain.

He has heard
  The song of the mystical river
And the bird
  That has sung in Saharin for ever.

He was here—
  Lo, he was the white-fire bringer!
You drew near
  But to mock and revile the sweet singer.

Oh, he came
  And he laid his white soul on the altar,
A pale flame
  That blazed and knew not how to falter!

Now you mourn—
  Far too late is your wailing and weeping;
For your scorn
  You have his dead clay in your keeping.

I, the Vampire

By HENRY KUTTNER

Dark horror settled down like a fog on Hollywood, the world's film capital, as an evil thing from overseas preyed on the celebrated stars of filmdom—an odd and curious story

1. The Chevalier Futaine

THE party was dull. I had come too early. There was a preview that night at Grauman's Chinese, and few of the important guests would arrive until it was over. Indeed, Jack Hardy, ace director at Summit Pictures, where I worked as assistant director, hadn't arrived—yet—and he was the host. But Hardy had never been noted for punctuality.

I went out on the porch and leaned against a pillar, sipping a cocktail and looking down at the lights of Hollywood. Hardy's place was on the summit of a hill overlooking the film capital, near Falcon Lair, Valentino's famous turreted castle. I shivered a little. Fog was sweeping in from Santa Monica, blotting out the lights to the west.

Jean Hubbard, who was an ingenue at Summit, came up beside me and took the glass out of my hand.

"Hello, Mart," she said, sipping the liquor. "Where've you been?"

"Down with the *Murder Desert* troupe, on location in the Mojave," I said. "Miss me, honey?"

I drew her close. She smiled up at me, her tilted eyebrows lending a touch of diablerie to the tanned, lovely face. I was going to marry Jean, but I wasn't sure just when.

"Missed you lots," she said, and held up her lips. I responded.

After a moment I said, "What's this about the vampire man?"

She chuckled. "Oh, the Chevalier Futaine. Didn't you read Lolly Parsons' write-up in *Script?* Jack Hardy picked him up last month in Europe. Silly rot. But it's good publicity."

"Three cheers for publicity," I said. "Look what it did for *Birth of a Nation.* But where does the vampire angle come in?"

"Mystery man. Nobody can take a picture of him, scarcely anybody can see him. Weird tales are told about his former life in Paris. Going to play in Jack's *Red Thirst.* The kind of build-up Universal gave Karloff for *Frankenstein.* The Chevalier Futaine"—she rolled out the words with amused relish—"is probably a singing waiter from a Paris café. I haven't seen him—but the deuce with him, anyway. Mart, I want you to do something for me. For Deming."

"Hess Deming?" I raised my eyebrows in astonishment. Hess Deming, Summit's biggest box-office star, whose wife, Sandra Colter, had died two days before. She, too, had been an actress, although never the great star her husband was. Hess loved her, I knew—and now I guessed what the trouble was. I said, "I noticed he was a bit wobbly."

"He'll kill himself," Jean said, looking worried. "I—I feel responsible for him somehow, Mart. After all, he gave me my start at Summit. And he's due for the D. T's any time now."

"Well, I'll do what I can," I told her. "But that isn't a great deal. After all,

getting tight is probably the best thing he could do. I know if I lost you, Jean——"

I stopped. I didn't like to think of it.

Jean nodded. "See what you can do for him, anyway. Losing Sandra that way was—pretty terrible."

"What way?" I asked. "I've been away, remember. I read something about it, but——"

"She just died," Jean said. "Pernicious anemia, they said. But Hess told me the doctor really didn't know what it was. She just seemed to grow weaker and weaker until—she passed away."

I nodded, gave Jean a hasty kiss, and went back into the house. I had just seen Hess Deming walk past, a glass in his hand.

He turned as I tapped his shoulder. "Oh, Mart," he said, his voice just a bit fuzzy. He could hold his liquor, but I could tell by his bloodshot eyes that he was almost at the end of his rope. He was a handsome devil, all right, well-built, strong-featured, with level gray eyes and a broad mouth that was usually smiling. It wasn't smiling now. It was

"For a brief while we walked the earth together, neither alive nor dead."

slack, and his face was bedewed with perspiration.

"You know about Sandra?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm sorry, Hess."

He drank deeply from the glass, wiped his mouth with a grimace of distaste.

"I'm drunk, Mart," he confided. "I had to get drunk. It was awful—those last few days. I've got to burn her up."

I didn't say anything.

"Burn her up. Oh, my God, Mart—that beautiful body of hers, crumbling to dust—and I've got to watch it! She made me promise I'd watch to make sure they burned her."

I said, "Cremation's a clean ending, Hess. And Sandra was a clean girl, and a damned good actress."

He put his flushed face close to mine. "Yeah—but I've got to burn her up. It'll kill me, Mart. Oh, God!" He put the empty glass down on a table and looked around dazedly.

I was wondering why Sandra had insisted on cremation. She'd given an interview once in which she stressed her dread of fire. Most write-ups of stars are applesauce, but I happened to know that Sandra did dread fire. Once, on the set, I'd seen her go into hysterics when her leading man lit his pipe too near her face.

"Excuse me, Mart," Hess said. "I've got to get another drink."

"Wait a minute," I said, holding him. "You want to watch yourself, Hess. You've had too much already."

"It still hurts," he said. "Just a little more and maybe it won't hurt so much." But he didn't pull away. Instead he stared at me with the dullness of intoxication in his eyes. "Clean," he said presently. "She said that too, Mart. She said burning was a clean death. But, God, that beautiful white body of hers—I can't stand it, Mart! I'm going crazy, I think. Get me a drink, like a good fellow."

I said, "Wait here, Hess. I'll get you one." I didn't add that it would be watered—considerably.

He sank down in a chair, mumbling thanks. As I went off I felt sick. I'd seen too many actors going on the rocks to mistake Hess's symptoms. I knew that his box-office days were over. There would be longer and longer waits between pictures, and then personal appearances, and finally Poverty Row and serials. And in the end maybe a man found dead in a cheap hall bedroom on Main Street, with the gas on.

THERE was a crowd around the bar. Somebody said, "Here's Mart. Hey, come over and meet the vampire."

Then I got a shock. I saw Jack Hardy, my host, the director with whom I'd worked on many a hit. He looked like a corpse. And I'd seen him looking plenty bad before. A man with a hangover, or a marijuana jag, isn't a pretty sight, but I'd never seen Hardy like this. He looked as though he was keeping going on his nerve alone. There was no blood in the man.

I'd last seen him as a stocky, ruddy blond, who looked like nothing so much as a wrestler, with his huge biceps, his ugly, good-natured face, and his bristling crop of yellow hair. Now he looked like a skeleton, with skin hanging loosely on the big frame. His face was a network of sagging wrinkles. Pouches bagged beneath his eyes, and those eyes were dull and glazed. About his neck a black silk scarf was knotted tightly.

"Good God, Jack!" I exclaimed. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

He looked away quickly. "Nothing," he said bruskly. "I'm all right. I want you to meet the Chevalier Futaine—this is Mart Prescott."

"Pierre," a voice said. "Hollywood is

no place for titles. Mart Prescott—the pleasure is mine."

I faced the Chevalier Pierre Futaine.

We shook hands. My first impression was of icy cold, and a slick kind of dryness—and I let go of his hand too quickly to be polite. He smiled at me.

A charming man, the Chevalier. Or so he seemed. Slender, below medium height, his bland, round face seemed incongruously youthful. Blond hair was plastered close to his scalp. I saw that his cheeks were rouged—very deftly, but I know something about make-up. And under the rouge I read a curious, deathly pallor that would have made him a marked man had he not disguised it. Some disease, perhaps, had blanched his skin—but his lips were not artificially reddened. And they were as crimson as blood.

He was clean-shaved, wore impeccable evening clothes, and his eyes were black pools of ink.

"Glad to know you," I said. "You're the vampire, eh?"

He smiled. "So they tell me. But we all serve the dark god of publicity, eh, Mr. Prescott? Or—is it Mart?"

"It's Mart," I said, still staring at him. I saw his eyes go past me, and an extraordinary expression appeared on his face—an expression of amazement, disbelief. Swiftly it was gone.

I turned. Jean was approaching, was at my side as I moved. She said, "Is this the Chevalier?"

Pierre Futaine was staring at her, his lips parted a little. Almost inaudibly he murmured, "Sonya." And then, on a note of interrogation, "Sonya?"

I introduced the two. Jean said, "You see, my name isn't Sonya."

The Chevalier shook his head, an odd look in his black eyes.

"I once knew a girl like you," he said softly. "Very much like you. It is strange."

"Will you excuse me?" I broke in. Jack Hardy was leaving the bar. Quickly I followed him.

I touched his shoulder as he went out the French windows. He jerked out a startled oath, turned a white death-mask of a face to me.

"Damn you, Mart," he snarled. "Keep your hands to yourself."

I put my hands on his shoulders and swung him around.

"What the devil has happened to you?" I asked. "Listen, Jack, you can't bluff me or lie to me. You know that. I've straightened you out enough times in the past, and I can do it again. Let me in on it."

His ruined face softened. He reached up and took away my hands. His own were ice-cold, like the hands of the Chevalier Futaine.

"No," he said. "No use, Mart. There's nothing you can do. I'm all right, really. Just—overstrain. I had too good a time in Paris."

I was up against a blank wall. Suddenly, without volition, a thought popped into my mind and out of my mouth before I knew it.

"What's the matter with your neck?" I asked abruptly.

He didn't answer. He just frowned and shook his head.

"I've a throat infection," he told me. "Caught it on the steamer."

His hand went up and touched the black scarf.

There was a croaking, harsh sound from behind us—a sound that didn't seem quite human. I turned. It was Hess Deming. He was swaying in the portal, his eyes glaring and bloodshot, a little trickle of saliva running down his chin.

He said in a dead, expressionless voice

that was somehow dreadful, "Sandra died of a throat infection, Hardy."

Jack didn't answer. He stumbled back a step. Hess went on dully.

"She got all white and died. And the doctor didn't know what it was, although the death certificate said anemia. Did you bring back some filthy disease with you, Hardy? Because if you did I'm going to kill you."

"Wait a minute," I said. "A throat infection? I didn't know——"

"There was a wound in her throat—two litle marks, close together. That couldn't have killed her, unless some loathsome disease——"

"You're crazy, Hess," I said. "You know you're drunk. Listen to me: Jack couldn't have had anything to do with—that."

Hess didn't look at me. He watched Jack Hardy out of his bloodshot eyes. He went on in that low, deadly monotone:

"Will you swear Mart's right, Hardy? Will you?"

Jack's lips were twisted by some inner agony. I said, "Go on, Jack. Tell him he's wrong."

Hardy burst out, "I haven't been near your wife! I haven't seen her since I got back. There's——"

"That's not the answer I want," Hess whispered. And he sprang for the other man—reeled forward, rather.

Hess was too drunk, and Jack too weak, for them to do each other any harm, but there was a nasty scuffle for a moment before I separated them. As I pulled them apart, Hess's hand clutched the scarf about Jack's neck, ripped it away.

And I saw the marks on Jack Hardy's throat. Two red, angry little pits, white-rimmed, just over the left jugular.

2. *The Cremation of Sandra*

It was the next day that Jean telephoned me.

"Mart," she said, "we're going to run over a scene for *Red Thirst* tonight at the studio—Stage 6. You've been assigned as assistant director on the pic, so you should be there. And—I had an idea Jack might not tell you. He's been—so odd lately."

"Thanks, honey," I said. "I'll be there. But I didn't know you were in the flicker."

"Neither did I, but there's been some wire-pulling. Somebody wanted me in it—the Chevalier, I think—and the big boss phoned me this morning and let me in on the secret. I don't feel up to it, though. Had a bad night."

"Sorry," I sympathized. "You were okay when I left you."

"I had a—nightmare," she said slowly. "It was rather frightful, Mart. It's funny, though, I can't remember what it was about. Well—you'll be there tonight?"

I said I would, but as it happened I was unable to keep my promise. Hess Deming telephoned me, asking if I'd come out to his Malibu place and drive him into town. He was too shaky to handle a car himself, he said, and Sandra's cremation was to take place that afternoon. I got out my roadster and sent it spinning west on Sunset. In twenty minutes I was at Deming's beach house.

The house-boy let me in, shaking his head gravely as he recognized me.

"Mist' Deming pretty bad," he told me. "All morning drinking gin straight——"

From upstairs Hess shouted, "That you, Mart? Okay—I'll be down right away. Come up here, Jim!"

The Japanese, with a meaning glance at me, pattered upstairs.

I wandered over to a table, examining the magazines upon it. A little breath of wind came through the half-open window, fluttering a scrap of paper. A word on it caught my eye, and I picked up the note. For that's what it was. It was addressed to Hess, and after one glance I had no compunction about scanning it.

"Hess dear," the message read. "I feel I'm going to die very soon. And I want you to do something for me. I've been out of my head, I know, saying things I didn't mean. Don't cremate me, Hess. Even though I were dead I'd feel the fire —I know it. Bury me in a vault in Forest Lawn—and don't embalm me. I shall be dead when you find this, but I know you'll do as I wish, dear. And, alive or dead, I'll always love you."

The note was signed by Sandra Colter, Hess's wife. This was odd. I wondered whether Hess had seen it yet.

There was a litle hiss of indrawn breath from behind me. It was Jim, the house-boy. He said, "Mist' Prescott—I find that note last night. Mist' Hess not seen it. It Mis' Colter's writing."

He hesitated, and I read fear in his eyes—sheer, unashamed fear. He put a brown forefinger on the note.

"See that, Mist' Prescott?"

He was pointing to a smudge of ink that half obscured the signature. I said, "Well?"

"I do that, Mist' Prescott. When I pick up the note. The ink—not dry."

I stared at him. He turned hastily at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. Hess Deming was coming down, rather shakily.

I think it was then that I first realized the horrible truth. I didn't believe it, though—not then. It was too fantastic, too incredible; yet something of the truth must have crept into my mind, for there was no other explanation for what I did then.

Hess said, "What have you got there, Mart?"

"Nothing," I said quietly. I crumpled the note and thrust it into my pocket. "Nothing important, anyway. Ready to go?"

He nodded, and we went to the door. I caught a glimpse of Jim staring after us, an expression of—was it relief?—in his dark, wizened face.

THE crematory was in Pasadena, and I left Hess there. I would have stayed with him, but he wouldn't have it. I knew he didn't want anyone to be watching him when Sandra's body was being incinerated. And I knew it would be easier for him that way. I took a short cut through the Hollywood hills, and that's where the trouble started.

I broke an axle. Recent rains had gullied the road, and I barely saved the car from turning over. After that I had to hike miles to the nearest telephone, and then I wasted more time waiting for a taxi to pick me up. It was nearly eight o'clock when I arrived at the studio.

The gateman let me in, and I hurried to Stage 6. It was dark. Cursing under my breath, I turned away, and almost collided with a small figure. It was Forrest, one of the cameramen. He let out a curious squeal, and clutched my arm.

"That you, Mart? Listen, will you do me a favor? I want you to watch a print——"

"Haven't time," I said. "Seen Jean around here? I was to——"

"It's about that," Forrest said. He was a shriveled, monkey-faced little chap, but a mighty good cameraman. "They've gone—Jean and Hardy and the Chevalier. There's something funny about that guy."

"Think so? Well, I'll phone Jean. I'll look at your rushes tomorrow."

"She won't be home," he told me. "The Chevalier took her over to the Grove. Listen, Mart, you've *got* to watch this. Either I don't know how to handle a grinder any more, or that Frenchman is the damnedest thing I've ever shot. Come over to the theater, Mart—I've got the reel ready to run. Just developed the rough print myself."

"Oh, all right," I assented, and followed Forrest to the theater.

I found a seat in the dark little auditorium, and listened to Forrest moving about in the projection booth. He clicked on the amplifier and said, "Hardy didn't want any pictures taken—insisted on it, you know. But the boss told me to leave one of the automatic cameras going—not to bother with the sound—just to get an idea how the French guy would screen. Lucky it wasn't one of the old rattler cameras, or Hardy would have caught on. Here it comes, Mart!"

I heard a click as the amplifier was switched off. White light flared on the screen. It faded, gave place to a picture—the interior of Stage 6. The set was incongruous—a mid-Victorian parlor, with overstuffed plush chairs, gilt-edged paintings, even a particularly hideous what-not. Jack Hardy moved into the range of the camera. On the screen his face seemed to leap out at me like a death's-head, covered with sagging, wrinkled skin. Following him came Jean, wearing a tailored suit—no one dresses for rehearsals—and behind her——

I blinked, thinking that my eyes were tricking me. Something like a glowing fog—oval, tall as a man—was moving across the screen. You've seen the nimbus of light on the screen when a flashlight is turned directly on the camera? Well—it was like that, except that its source was not traceable. And, horribly, it moved forward at about the pace a man would walk.

The amplifier clicked again. Forrest said, "When I saw it on the negative I thought I was screwy, Mart. I saw the take—there wasn't any funny light there. Look——" The oval, glowing haze was motionless beside Jean, and she was looking directly at it, a smile on her lips. "Mart, when that was taken, Jean was looking right at the French guy!"

I said, somewhat hoarsely, "Hold it, Forrest. Right there."

The images slowed down, became motionless. Jean's left profile was toward the camera. I leaned forward, staring at something I had glimpsed on the girl's neck. It was scarcely visible save as a tiny, discolored mark on Jean's throat, above the jugular—but unmistakably the same wound I had seen on the throat of Jack Hardy the night before!

I heard the amplifier click off. Suddenly the screen showed blindingly white, and then went black.

I waited a moment, but there was no sound from the booth.

"Forrest," I called. "You okay?"

There was no sound. The faint whirring of the projector had died. I got up quickly and went to the back of the theater. There were two entrances to the booth, a door which opened on stairs leading down to the alley outside, and a hole in the floor reached by means of a metal ladder. I went up this swiftly, an ominous apprehension mounting within me.

FORREST was still there. But he was no longer alive. He lay sprawled on his back, his wizened face staring up blindly, his head twisted at an impossible angle. It was quite apparent that his neck had been broken almost instantly.

I sent a hasty glance at the projector. The can of film was gone! And the door

opening on the stairway was ajar a few inches.

I stepped out on the stairs, although I knew I would see no one. The white-lit, broad alley between Stages 6 and 4 was silent and empty.

The sound of running feet came to me, steadily growing louder. A man came racing into view. I recognized him as one of the publicity gang. I hailed him.

"Can't wait," he gasped, but slowed down nevertheless.

I said, "Have you seen anyone around here just now? The—Chevalier Futaine?"

He shook his head. "No, but——" His face was white as he looked up at me. "Hess Deming's gone crazy. I've got to contact the papers."

Ice gripped me. I raced down the stairs, clutched his arm.

"What do you mean?" I snapped. "Hess was all right when I left him. A bit tight, that's all."

His face was glistening with sweat. "It's awful—I'm not sure yet what happened. His wife—Sandra Colter—came to life while they were cremating her. They saw her through the window, you know—screaming and pounding at the glass while she was being burned alive. Hess got her out too late. He went stark, raving mad. Suspended animation, they say—I've got to get to a phone, Mr. Prescott!"

He tore himself away, sprinted in the direction of the administration buildings.

I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out a scrap of paper. It was the note I had found in Hess Deming's house. The words danced and wavered before my eyes. Over and over I was telling myself, "It can't be true! Such things can't happen!"

I didn't mean Sandra Colter's terrible resurrection during the cremation. That, alone, might be plausibly explained—catalepsy, perhaps. But taken in conjunction with certain other occurrences, it led to one definite conclusion—and it was a conclusion I dared not face.

What had poor Forrest said? That the Chevalier was taking Jean to the Cocoanut Grove? Well——

The taxi was still waiting. I got in.

"The Ambassador," I told the driver grimly. "Twenty bucks if you hit the green lights all the way."

3. The Black Coffin

All night I had been combing Hollywood—without success. Neither the Chevalier Futaine nor Jean had been to the Grove, I discovered. And no one knew the Chevalier's address. A telephone call to the studio, now ablaze with excitement over the Hess Deming disaster and the Forrest killing, netted me exactly nothing. I went the rounds of Hollywood night life vainly. The Trocadero, Sardi's, all three of the Brown Derbies, the smart, notorious clubs of the Sunset eighties—nowhere could I find my quarry. I telephoned Jack Hardy a dozen times, but got no answer. Finally, in a "private club" in Culver City, I met with my first stroke of good luck.

"Mr. Hardy's upstairs," the proprietor told me, looking anxious. "Nothing wrong, I hope, Mr. Prescott? I heard about Deming."

"Nothing," I said. "Take me up to him."

"He's sleeping it off," the man admitted. "Tried to drink the place dry, and I put him upstairs where he'd be safe."

"Not the first time, eh?" I said, with an assumption of lightness. "Well, bring up some coffee, will you? Black. I've got to—talk to him."

But it was half an hour before Hardy was in any shape to understand what I

was saying. At last he sat up on the couch, blinking, and a gleam of realization came into his sunken eyes.

"Prescott," he said, "can't you leave me alone?"

I leaned close to him, articulating carefully so he would be sure to understand me. "I know what the Chevalier Futaine is," I said.

And I waited for the dreadful, impossible confirmation, or for the words which would convince me that I was an insane fool.

Hardy looked at me dully. "How did you find out?" he whispered.

An icy shock went through me. Up to that moment I had not really believed, in spite of all the evidence. But now Hardy was confirming the suspicions which I had not let myself believe.

I didn't answer his question. Instead, I said, "Do you know about Hess?"

He nodded, and at sight of the agony in his face I almost pitied him. Then the thought of Jean steadied me.

"Do you know where he is now?" I asked.

"No. What are you talking about?" he flared suddenly. "Are you mad, Mart? Do you——"

"I'm not mad. But Hess Deming is."

He looked at me like a cowering, whipped dog.

I went on grimly: "Are you going to tell me the truth? How you got those marks on your throat? How you met this—creature? And where he's taken Jean?"

"Jean!" He looked genuinely startled. "Has he got—I didn't know that, Mart—I swear I didn't. You—you've been a good friend to me, and—and I'll tell you the truth—for your sake and Jean's—although now it may be too late——"

My involuntary movement made him glance at me quickly. Then he went on.

"I met him in Paris. I was out after new sensations—but I didn't expect anything like that. A Satanist club—devil-worshippers, they were. The ordinary stuff—cheap, furtive blasphemy. But it was there that I met—him.

"He can be a fascinating chap when he tries. He drew me out, made me tell him about Hollywood—about the women we have here. I bragged a little. He asked me about the stars, whether they were really as beautiful as they seemed. His eyes were hungry as he listened to me, Mart.

"Then one night I had a fearful nightmare. A monstrous, black horror crept in through my window and attacked me—bit me in the throat, I dreamed, or thought I did. After that——

"I was in his power. He told me the truth. He made me his slave, and I could do nothing. His powers—are not human."

I licked dry lips. Hardy continued:

"He made me bring him here, introducing him as a new discovery to be starred in *Red Thirst*—I'd mentioned the picture to him, before I—knew. How he must have laughed at me! He made me serve him, keeping away photographers, making sure that there were no cameras, no mirrors near him. And for a reward—he let me live."

I KNEW I should feel contempt for Hardy, panderer to such a loathsome evil. But somehow I couldn't.

I said quietly, "What about Jean? Where does the Chevalier live?"

He told me. "But you can't do anything, Mart. There's a vault under the house, where he stays during the day. It can't be opened, except with a key he always keeps with him—a silver key. He had a door specially made, and then did something to it so that nothing can open it but that key. Even dynamite wouldn't do it, he told me."

I said, "Such things—can be killed."

"Not easily. Sandra Colter was a victim of his. After death she, too, became a vampire, sleeping by day and living only at night. The fire destroyed her, but there's no way to get into the vault under Futaine's house."

"I wasn't thinking of fire," I said. "A knife——"

"Through the heart," Hardy interrupted almost eagerly. "Yes—and decapitation. I've thought of it myself, but I can do nothing. I—am his slave, Mart."

I said nothing, but pressed the bell. Presently the proprietor appeared.

"Can you get me a butcher-knife?" I measured with my hands. "About so long? A sharp one?"

Accustomed to strange requests, he nodded. "Right away, Mr. Prescott."

As I followed him out, Hardy said weakly, "Mart."

I turned.

"Good luck," he said. The look on his wrecked face robbed the words of their pathos.

"Thanks," I forced myself to say. "I don't blame you, Jack, for what's happened. I—I'd have done the same."

I left him there, slumped on the couch, staring after me with eyes that had looked into hell.

It was past daylight when I drove out of Culver City, a long, razor-edged knife hidden securely inside my coat. And the day went past all too quickly. A telephone call told me that Jean had not yet returned home. It took me more than an hour to locate a certain man I wanted—a man who had worked for the studio before on certain delicate jobs. There was little about locks he did not know, as the police had sometimes ruefully admitted.

His name was Axel Ferguson, a bulky, good-natured Swede, whose thick fingers seemed more adapted to handling a shovel than the mechanisms of locks. Yet he was as expert as Houdini—indeed, he had at one time been a professional magician.

The front door of Futaine's isolated canyon home proved no bar to Ferguson's fingers and the tiny sliver of steel he used. The house, a modern two-story place, seemed deserted. But Hardy had said *below* the house.

We went down the cellar stairs and found ourselves in a concrete-lined passage that ran down at a slight angle for perhaps thirty feet. There the corridor ended in what seemed to be a blank wall of bluish steel. The glossy surface of the door was unbroken, save for a single keyhole.

Ferguson set to work. At first he hummed under his breath, but after a time he worked in silence. Sweat began to glisten on his face. Trepidation assailed me as I watched.

The flashlight he had placed beside him grew dim. He inserted another battery, got out unfamiliar-looking apparatus. He buckled on dark goggles, and handed me a pair. A blue, intensely brilliant flame began to play on the door.

It was useless. The torch was discarded after a time, and Ferguson returned to his tools. He was using a stethoscope, taking infinite pains in the delicate movements of his hands.

It was fascinating to watch him. But all the time I realized that the night was coming, that presently the sun would go down, and that the life of the vampire lasts from sunset to sunrise.

At last Ferguson gave up. "I can't do it," he told me, panting as though from a hard race. "And if I can't, nobody can. Even Houdini couldn't have broken this lock. The only thing that'll open it is the key."

"All right, Axel," I said dully. "Here's your money."

He hesitated, watching me. "You going to stay here, Mr. Prescott?"

"Yeah," I said. "You can find your way out. I'll—wait awhile."

"Well, I'll leave the light with you," he said. "You can let me have it sometime, eh?"

He waited, and, as I made no answer, he departed, shaking his head.

Then utter silence closed around me. I took the knife out of my coat, tested its edge against my thumb, and settled back to wait.

Less than half an hour later the steel door began to swing open. I stood up. Through the widening crack I saw a bare, steel-lined chamber, empty save for a long, black object that rested on the floor. It was a coffin.

The door was wide. Into view moved a white, slender figure—Jean, clad in a diaphanous, silken robe. Her eyes were wide, fixed and staring. She looked like a sleep-walker.

A man followed her—a man wearing impeccable evening clothes. Not a hair was out of place on his sleek blond head, and he was touching his lips delicately with a handkerchief as he came out of the vault.

There was a little crimson stain on the white linen where his lips had brushed.

4. I, the Vampire

JEAN walked past me as though I didn't exist. But the Chevalier Futaine paused, his eyebrows lifted. His black eyes pierced through me.

The handle of the knife was hot in my hand. I moved aside to block Futaine's way. Behind me came a rustle of silk, and from the corner of my eye I saw Jean pause hesitatingly.

The Chevalier eyed me, toying negligently with his handkerchief. "Mart," he said slowly. "Mart Prescott." His eyes flickered toward the knife, and a little smile touched his lips.

I said, "You know why I'm here, don't you?"

"Yes," he said. "I—heard you. I was not disturbed. Only one thing can open this door."

From his pocket he drew a key, shining with a dull silver sheen.

"Only this," he finished, replacing it. "Your knife is useless, Mart Prescott."

"Maybe," I said, edging forward very slightly. "What have you done to Jean?"

A curious expression, almost of pain, flashed into his eyes. "She is mine," he shot out half angrily. "You can do nothing, for——"

I sprang then, or, at least, I tried to. The blade of the knife sheared down, straight for Futaine's white shirtfront. It was arrested in midair. Yet he had not moved. His eyes had bored into mine, suddenly, terribly, and it seemed as though a wave of fearful energy had blasted out at me—paralyzing me, rendering me helpless. I stood rigid. Veins throbbed in my temples as I tried to move—to bring down the knife. It was useless. I stood as immovable as a statue.

The Chevalier brushed past me.

"Follow," he said almost casually, and like an automaton I swung about, began to move along the passage. What hellish hypnotic power was this that held me helpless?

Futaine led the way upstairs. It was not yet dark, although the sun had gone down. I followed him into a room, and at his gesture dropped into a chair. At my side was a small table. The Chevalier touched my arm gently, and something like a mild electric shock went through me. The knife dropped from my fingers, clattering to the table.

Jean was standing rigidly near by, her

eyes dull and expressionless. Futaine moved to her side, put an arm about her waist. My mouth felt as though it were filled with mud, but somehow I managed to croak out articulate words.

"Damn you, Futaine! Leave her alone!"

He released her, and came toward me, his face dark with anger.

"You fool, I could kill you now, very easily. I could make you go down to the busiest corner of Hollywood and slit your throat with that knife. I have the power. You have found out much, apparently. Then you know—my power."

"Yes," I muttered thickly. "I know that. You devil—Jean is mine!"

The face of a beast looked into mine. He snarled, "She is not yours. Nor is she—*Jean*. She is Sonya!"

I remembered what Futaine had murmured when he had first seen Jean. He read the question in my eyes.

"I knew a girl like that once, very long ago. That was Sonya. They killed her—put a stake through her heart, long ago in Thurn. Now that I've found this girl, who might be a reincarnation of Sonya—they are so alike—I shall not give her up. Nor can anyone force me."

"You've made her a devil like yourself," I said through half-paralyzed lips. "I'd rather kill her——"

Futaine turned to watch Jean. "Not yet," he said softly. "She is mine—yes. She bears the stigmata. But she is still—alive. She will not become—*wampyr*—until she has died, or until she has tasted the red milk. She shall do that tonight."

I cursed him bitterly, foully. He touched my lips, and I could utter no sound. Then they left me—Jean and her master. I heard a door close quietly.

THE night dragged on. Futile struggles had convinced me that it was useless to attempt escape—I could not even force a whisper through my lips. More than once I felt myself on the verge of madness—thinking of Jean, and remembering Futaine's ominous words. Eventually agony brought its own surcease, and I fell into a kind of coma, lasting for how long I could not guess. Many hours had passed, I knew, before I heard footsteps coming toward my prison.

Jean moved into my range of vision. I searched her face with my eyes, seeking for some mark of a dreadful metamorphosis. I could find none. Her beauty was unmarred, save for the terrible little wounds on her throat. She went to a couch and quietly lay down. Her eyes closed.

The Chevalier came past me and went to Jean's side. He stood looking down at her. I have mentioned before the incongruous youthfulness of his face. That was gone now. He looked old—old beyond imagination.

At last he shrugged and turned to me. His fingers brushed my lips again, and I found that I could speak. Life flooded back into my veins, bringing lancing twinges of pain. I moved an arm experimentally. The paralysis was leaving me.

The Chevalier said, "She is still—clean. I could not do it."

Amazement flooded me. My eyes widened in disbelief.

Futaine smiled wryly. "It is quite true. I could have made her as myself—undead. But at the last moment I forbade her." He looked toward the windows. "It will be dawn soon."

I glanced at the knife on the table beside me. The Chevalier put out a hand and drew it away.

"Wait," he said. "There is something I must tell you, Mart Prescott. You say that you know who and what I am."

I nodded.

"Yet you cannot know," he went on. "Something you have learned, and some-

thing you have guessed, but you can never know me. You are human, and I am—the undead.

"Through the ages I have come, since first I fell victim to another vampire—for thus is the evil spread. Deathless and not alive, bringing fear and sorrow always, knowing the bitter agony of Tantalus, I have gone down through the weary centuries. I have known Richard and Henry and Elizabeth of England, and ever have I brought terror and destruction in the night, for I am an alien thing. I am the undead."

The quiet voice went on, holding me motionless in its weird spell.

"I, the vampire. I, the accursed, the shining evil, *negotium perambulans in tenebris* . . . but I was not always thus. Long ago in Thurn, before the shadow fell upon me, I loved a girl—Sonya. But the vampire visited me, and I sickened and died—and awoke. Then I arose.

"It is the curse of the undead to prey upon those they love. I visited Sonya. I made her my own. She, too, died, and for a brief while we walked the earth together, neither alive nor dead. But that was not Sonya. It was her body, yes, but I had not loved her body alone. I realized too late that I had destroyed her utterly.

"One day they opened her grave, and the priest drove a stake through her heart, and gave her rest. Me they could not find, for my coffin was hidden too well. I put love behind me then, knowing that there was none for such as I.

"Hope came to me when I found—Jean. Hundreds of years have passed since Sonya crumbled to dust, but I thought I had found her again. And—I took her. Nothing human could prevent me."

The Chevalier's eyelids sagged. He looked infinitely old.

"Nothing human. Yet in the end I found that I could not condemn her to the hell that is mine. I thought I had forgotten love. But, long and long ago, I loved Sonya. And, because of her, and because I know that I would only destroy, as I did once before, I shall not work my will on this girl."

I turned to watch the still figure on the couch. The Chevalier followed my gaze and nodded slowly.

"Yes, she bears the stigmata. She will die, unless"—he met my gaze unflinchingly—"unless I die. If you had broken into the vault yesterday, if you had sunk that knife into my heart, she would be free now." He glanced at the windows again. "The sun will rise soon."

Then he went quickly to Jean's side. He looked down at her for a moment.

"She is very beautiful," he murmured. "Too beautiful for hell."

The Chevalier swung about, went toward the door. As he passed me he threw something carelessly on the table, something that tinkled as it fell. In the portal he paused, and a little smile twisted the scarlet lips. I remembered him thus, framed against the black background of the doorway, his sleek blond head erect and unafraid. He lifted his arm in a gesture that should have been theatrical, but, somehow, wasn't.

"And so farewell. I who am about to die——"

He did not finish. In the faint grayness of dawn I saw him striding away, heard his footsteps on the stairs, receding and faint—heard a muffled clang as of a great door closing. The paralysis had left me. I was trembling a little, for I realized what I must do soon. But I knew I would not fail.

I glanced down at the table. Even before I saw what lay beside the knife, I knew what would be there. A silver key . . .

"With stark fear clutching at his heart he saw the candles go out one by one."

Dig Me No Grave

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A shuddery tale of dark horror and evil things, and the uncanny funeral rites over the corpse of old John Grimlan

THE thunder of my old-fashioned door-knocker, reverberating eerily through the house, roused me from a restless and nightmare-haunted sleep. I looked out the window. In the last light of the sinking moon, the white face of my friend John Conrad looked up at me.

"May I come up, Kirowan?" His voice was shaky and strained.

"Certainly!" I sprang out of bed and pulled on a bath-robe as I heard him

enter the front door and ascend the stairs.

A moment later he stood before me, and in the light which I had turned on I saw his hands tremble and noticed the unnatural pallor of his face.

"Old John Grimlan died an hour ago," he said abruptly.

"Indeed? I had not known that he was ill."

"It was a sudden, virulent attack of peculiar nature, a sort of seizure somewhat akin to epilepsy. He has ben subject to such spells of late years, you know."

I nodded. I knew something of the old hermit-like man who had lived in his great dark house on the hill; indeed, I had once witnessed one of his strange seizures, and I had been appalled at the writhings, howlings and yammerings of the wretch, who had groveled on the earth like a wounded snake, gibbering terrible curses and black blasphemies until his voice broke in a wordless screaming which spattered his lips with foam. Seeing this, I understood why people in old times looked on such victims as men possessed by demons.

"——some hereditary taint," Conrad was saying. "Old John doubtless fell heir to some ingrown weakness brought on by some loathsome disease, which was his heritage from perhaps a remote ancestor—such things occasionally happen. Or else—well, you know old John himself pried about in the mysterious parts of the earth, and wandered all over the East in his younger days. It is quite possible that he was infected with some obscure malady in his wanderings. There are still many unclassified diseases in Africa and the Orient."

"But," said I, "you have not told me the reason for this sudden visit at this unearthly hour—for I notice that it is past midnight."

My friend seemed rather confused.

"Well, the fact is that John Grimlan died alone, except for myself. He refused to receive any medical aid of any sort, and in the last few moments when it was evident that he was dying, and I was prepared to go for some sort of help in spite of him, he set up such a howling and screaming that I could not refuse his passionate pleas—which were that he should not be left to die alone.

"I have seen men die," added Conrad, wiping the perspiration from his pale brow, "but the death of John Grimlan was the most fearful I have ever seen."

"He suffered a great deal?"

"He appeared to be in much physical agony, but this was mostly submerged by some monstrous mental or psychic suffering. The fear in his distended eyes and his screams transcended any conceivable earthly terror. I tell you, Kirowan, Grimlan's fright was greater and deeper than the ordinary fear of the Beyond shown by a man of ordinarily evil life."

I shifted restlessly. The dark implications of this statement sent a chill of nameless apprehension trickling down my spine.

"I know the country people always claimed that in his youth he sold his soul to the Devil, and that his sudden epileptic attacks were merely a visible sign of the Fiend's power over him; but such talk is foolish, of course, and belongs in the Dark Ages. We all know that John Grimlan's life was a peculiarly evil and vicious one, even toward his last days. With good reason he was universally detested and feared, for I never heard of his doing a single good act. You were his only friend."

"And that was a strange friendship," said Conrad. "I was attracted to him by his unusual powers, for despite his bestial nature, John Grimlan was a highly educated man, a deeply cultured man. He

had dipped deep into occult studies, and I first met him in this manner; for as you know, I have always been strongly interested in these lines of research myself.

"But, in this as in all other things, Grimlan was evil and perverse. He had ignored the white side of the occult and delved into the darker, grimmer phases of it—into devil-worship, and voodoo and Shintoism. His knowledge of these foul arts and sciences was immense and unholy. And to hear him tell of his researches and experiments was to know such horror and repulsion as a venomous reptile might inspire. For there had been no depths to which he had not sunk, and some things he only hinted at, even to me. I tell you, Kirowan, it is easy to laugh at tales of the black world of the unknown, when one is in pleasant company under the bright sunlight, but had you sat at ungodly hours in the silent bizarre library of John Grimlan and looked on the ancient musty volumes and listened to his grisly talk as I did, your tongue would have cloven to your palate with sheer horror as mine did, and the supernatural would have seemed very real and near to you—as it seemed to me!"

"But in God's name, man!" I cried, for the tension was growing unbearable; "come to the point and tell me what you want of me."

"I want you to come with me to John Grimlan's house and help carry out his outlandish instructions in regard to his body."

I HAD no liking for the adventure, but I dressed hurriedly, an occasional shudder of premonition shaking me. Once fully clad, I followed Conrad out of the house and up the silent road which led to the house of John Grimlan. The road wound uphill, and all the way, looking upward and forward, I could see that great grim house perched like a bird of evil on the crest of the hill, bulking black and stark against the stars. In the west pulsed a single dull red smear where the young moon had just sunk from view behind the low black hills. The whole night seemed full of brooding evil, and the persistent swishing of a bat's wings somewhere overhead caused my taut nerves to jerk and thrum. To drown the quick pounding of my own heart, I said:

"Do you share the belief so many hold, that John Grimlan was mad?"

We strode on several paces before Conrad answered, seemingly with a strange reluctance, "But for one incident, I would say no man was ever saner. But one night in his study, he seemed suddenly to break all bonds of reason.

"He had discoursed for hours on his favorite subject—black magic—when suddenly he cried, as his face lit with a weird unholy glow: 'Why should I sit here babbling such child's prattle to you? These voodoo rituals—these Shinto sacrifices—feathered snakes—goats without horns—black leopard cults—bah! Filth and dust that the wind blows away! Dregs of the real Unknown—the deep mysteries! Mere echoes from the Abyss!

" 'I could tell you things that would shatter your paltry brain! I could breathe into your ear names that would wither you like a burnt weed! What do you know of Yog-Sothoth, of Kathulos and the sunken cities? None of these names is even included in your mythologies. Not even in your dreams have you glimpsed the black cyclopean walls of Koth, or shriveled before the noxious winds that blow from Yuggoth!

" 'But I will not blast you lifeless with my black wisdom! I cannot expect your infantile brain to bear what mine holds. Were you as old as I—had you seen,

as I have seen, kingdoms crumble and generations pass away—had you gathered as ripe grain the dark secrets of the centuries——'

"He was raving away, his wildly lit face scarcely human in appearance, and suddenly, noting my evident bewilderment, he burst into a horrible cackling laugh.

" 'Gad!' he cried in a voice and accent strange to me, 'methinks I've frighted ye, and certes, it is not to be marveled at, sith ye be but a naked salvage in the arts of life, after all. Ye think I be old, eh? Why, ye gaping lout, ye'd drop dead were I to divulge the generations of men I've known——'

"But at this point such horror overcame me that I fled from him as from an adder, and his high-pitched, diabolical laughter followed me out of the shadowy house. Some days later I received a letter apologizing for his manner and ascribing it candidly—too candidly—to drugs. I did not believe it, but I renewed our relations, after some hesitation."

"It sounds like utter madness," I muttered.

"Yes," admitted Conrad, hesitantly. "But—Kirowan, have you ever seen anyone who knew John Grimlan in his youth?"

I shook my head.

"I have been at pains to inquire about him discreetly," said Conrad. "He has lived here—with the exception of mysterious absences often for months at a time—for twenty years. The older villagers remember distinctly when he first came and took over that old house on the hill, and they all say that in the intervening years he seems not to have aged perceptibly. When he came here he looked just as he does now—or did, up to the moment of his death—of the appearance of a man about fifty.

"I met old Von Boehnk in Vienna, who said he knew Grimlan when a very young man studying in Berlin, fifty years ago, and he expressed astonishment that the old man was still living; for he said at that time Grimlan seemed to be about fifty years of age."

I gave an incredulous exclamation, seeing the implication toward which the conversation was trending.

"Nonsense! Professor Von Boehnk is past eighty himself, and liable to the errors of extreme age. He confused this man with another." Yet as I spoke, my flesh crawled unpleasantly and the hairs on my neck prickled.

"Well," shrugged Conrad, "here we are at the house."

The huge pile reared up menacingly before us, and as we reached the front door a vagrant wind moaned through the near-by trees and I started foolishly as I again heard the ghostly beat of the bat's wings. Conrad turned a large key in the antique lock, and as we entered, a cold draft swept across us like a breath from the grave—moldy and cold. I shuddered.

We groped our way through a black hallway and into a study, and here Conrad lighted a candle, for no gas lights or electric lights were to be found in the house. I looked about me, dreading what the light might disclose, but the room, heavily tapestried and bizarrely furnished, was empty save for us two.

"Where—where is—*It?*" I asked in a husky whisper, from a throat gone dry.

"Upstairs," answered Conrad in a low voice, showing that the silence and mystery of the house had laid a spell on him also. "Upstairs, in the library where he died."

I glanced up involuntarily. Somewhere above our head, the lone master of this grim house was stretched out in his last sleep—silent, his white face set in a

grinning mask of death. Panic swept over me and I fought for control. After all, it was merely the corpse of a wicked old man, who was past harming anyone—this argument rang hollowly in my brain like the words of a frightened child who is trying to reassure himself.

I turned to Conrad. He had taken a time-yellowed envelope from an inside pocket.

"This," he said, removing from the envelope several pages of closely written, time-yellowed parchment, "is, in effect, the last word of John Grimlan, though God alone knows how many years ago it was written. He gave it to me ten years ago, immediately after his return from Mongolia. It was shortly after this that he had his first seizure.

"This envelope he gave me, sealed, and he made me swear that I would hide it carefully, and that I would not open it until he was dead, when I was to read the contents and follow their directions exactly. More, he made me swear that no matter what he said or did after giving me the envelope, I would go ahead as first directed. 'For,' he said with a fearful smile, 'the flesh is weak but I am a man of my word, and though I might, in a moment of weakness, wish to retract, it is far, far too late now. You may never understand the matter, but you are to do as I have said.' "

"Well?"

"Well," again Conrad wiped his brow, "tonight as he lay writhing in his death-agonies, his wordless howls were mingled with frantic admonitions to me to bring him the envelope and destroy it before his eyes! As he yammered this, he forced himself up on his elbows and with eyes starting and hair standing straight up on his head, he screamed at me in a manner to chill the blood. And he was shrieking for me to destroy the envelope, not to open it; and once he howled in his delirium for me to hew his body into pieces and scatter the bits to the four winds of heaven!"

An uncontrollable exclamation of horror escaped my dry lips.

"At last," went on Conrad, "I gave in. Remembering his commands ten years ago, I at first stood firm, but at last, as his screeches grew unbearably desperate, I turned to go for the envelope, even though that meant leaving him alone. But as I turned, with one last fearful convulsion in which blood-flecked foam flew from his writhing lips, the life went from his twisted body in a single great wrench."

He fumbled at the parchment.

"I am going to carry out my promise. The directions herein seem fantastic and may be the whims of a disordered mind, but I gave my word. They are, briefly, that I place his corpse on the great black ebony table in his library, with seven black candles burning about him. The doors and windows are to be firmly closed and fastened. Then, in the darkness which precedes dawn, I am to read the formula, charm or spell which is contained in a smaller, sealed envelope inside the first, and which I have not yet opened."

"But is that all?" I cried. "No provisions as to the disposition of his fortune, his estate—or his corpse?"

"Nothing. In his will, which I have seen elsewhere, he leaves estate and fortune to a certain oriental gentleman named in the document as—Malik Tous!"

"What!" I cried, shaken to my soul. "Conrad, this is madness heaped on madness! Malik Tous—good God! No mortal man was ever so named! That is the title of the foul god worshipped by the mysterious Yezidees—they of Mount Alamout the Accursed—whose Eight Brazen Towers rise in the mysterious wastes of

deep Asia. His idolatrous symbol is the brazen peacock. And the Muhammadans, who hate his demon-worshipping devotees, say he is the essence of the evil of all the universes—the Prince of Darkness—Ahriman—the old Serpent—the veritable Satan! And you say Grimlan names this mythical demon in his will?"

"It is the truth," Conrad's throat was dry. "And look—he has scribbled a strange line at the corner of this parchment: 'Dig me no grave; I shall not need one.' "

Again a chill wandered down my spine.

"In God's name," I cried in a kind of frenzy, "let us get this incredible business over with!"

"I think a drink might help," answered Conrad, moistening his lips. "It seems to me I've seen Grimlan go into this cabinet for wine——" He bent to the door of an ornately carved mahogany cabinet, and after some difficulty opened it.

"No wine here," he said disappointedly, "and if ever I felt the need of stimulants—what's this?"

He drew out a roll of parchment, dusty, yellowed and half covered with spiderwebs. Everything in that grim house seemed, to my nervously excited senses, fraught with mysterious meaning and import, and I leaned over his shoulder as he unrolled it.

"It's a record of peerage," he said, "such a chronicle of births, deaths and so forth, as the old families used to keep, in the Sixteenth Century and earlier."

"What's the name?" I asked.

He scowled over the dim scrawls, striving to master the faded, archaic script.

"G-r-y-m—I've got it—Grymlann, of course. It's the records of old John's family—the Grymlanns of Toad's-heath Manor, Suffolk—what an outlandish name for an estate! Look at the last entry."

Together we read, "John Grymlann, borne, March 10, 1630." And then we both cried out. Under this entry was freshly written, in a strange scrawling hand, "Died, March 10, 1930." Below this there was a seal of black wax, stamped with a strange design, something like a peacock with a spreading tail.

Conrad stared at me speechless, all the color ebbed from his face. I shook myself with the rage engendered by fear.

"It's the hoax of a madman!" I shouted. "The stage has been set with such great care that the actors have overstepped themselves. Whoever they are, they have heaped up so many incredible effects as to nullify them. It's all a very stupid, very dull drama of illusion."

And even as I spoke, icy sweat stood out on my body and I shook as with an ague. With a wordless motion Conrad turned toward the stairs, taking up a large candle from a mahogany table.

"It was understood, I suppose," he whispered, "that I should go through with this ghastly matter alone; but I had not the moral courage, and now I'm glad I had not."

A still horror brooded over the silent house as we went up the stairs. A faint breeze stole in from somewhere and set the heavy velvet hangings rustling, and I visualized stealthy taloned fingers drawing aside the tapestries, to fix red gloating eyes upon us. Once I thought I heard the indistinct clumping of monstrous feet somewhere above us, but it must have been the heavy pounding of my own heart.

The stairs debouched into a wide dark corridor, in which our feeble candle cast a faint gleam which but illuminated our

pale faces and made the shadows seem darker by comparison. We stopped at a heavy door, and I heard Conrad's breath draw in sharply as a man's will when he braces himself physically or mentally. I involuntarily clenched my fists until the nails bit into the palms; then Conrad thrust the door open.

A sharp cry escaped his lips. The candle dropped from his nerveless fingers and went out. The library of John Grimlan was ablaze with light, though the whole house had been in darkness when we entered it.

This light came from seven black candles placed at regular intervals about the great ebony table. On this table, between the candles—I had braced myself against the sight. Now in the face of the mysterious illumination and the sight of the thing on the table, my resolution nearly gave way. John Grimlan had been unlovely in life; in death he was hideous. Yes, he was hideous even though his face was mercifully covered with the same curious silken robe, which, worked in fantastic bird-like designs, covered his whole body except the crooked claw-like hands and the bare withered feet.

A strangling sound came from Conrad. "My God!" he whispered; "what is this? I laid his body out on the table and placed the candles about it, but I did not light them, nor did I place that robe over the body! And there were bedroom slippers on his feet when I left——"

He halted suddenly. We were not alone in the deathroom.

At first we had not seen him, as he sat in the great armchair in a farther nook of a corner, so still that he seemed a part of the shadows cast by the heavy tapestries. As my eyes fell upon him, a violent shuddering shook me and a feeling akin to nausea racked the pit of my stomach. My first impression was of vivid, oblique yellow eyes which gazed unwinkingly at us. Then the man rose and made a deep salaam, and we saw that he was an oriental. Now when I strive to etch him clearly in my mind, I can resurrect no plain image of him. I only remember those piercing eyes and the yellow, fantastic robe he wore.

We returned his salute mechanically and he spoke in a low, refined voice, "Gentlemen, I crave your pardon! I have made so free as to light the candles—shall we not proceed with the business pertaining to our mutual friend?"

He made a slight gesture toward the silent bulk on the table. Conrad nodded, evidently unable to speak. The thought flashed through our minds at the same time, that this man had also been given a sealed envelope—but how had he come to the Grimlan house so quickly? John Grimlan had been dead scarcely two hours and to the best of our knowledge no one knew of his demise but ourselves. And how had he got into the locked and bolted house?

The whole affair was grotesque and unreal in the extreme. We did not even introduce ourselves or ask the stranger his name. He took charge in a matter-of-fact way, and so under the spell of horror and illusion were we that we moved dazedly, involuntarily obeying his suggestions, given us in a low, respectful tone.

I found myself standing on the left side of the table, looking across its grisly burden at Conrad. The oriental stood with arms folded and head bowed at the head of the table, nor did it then strike me as being strange that he should stand there, instead of Conrad who was to read what Grimlan had written. I found my gaze drawn to the figure worked on the breast of the stranger's robe, in black silk—a curious figure, somewhat resembling a peacock and somewhat resembling a bat, or a flying dragon. I noted with a

start that the same design was worked on the robe covering the corpse.

THE doors had been locked, the windows fastened down. Conrad, with a shaky hand, opened the inner envelope and fluttered open the parchment sheets contained therein. These sheets seemed much older than those containing the instructions to Conrad, in the larger envelope. Conrad began to read in a monotonous drone which had the effect of hypnosis on the hearer; so at times the candles grew dim in my gaze and the room and its occupants swam strange and monstrous, veiled and distorted like an hallucination. Most of what he read was gibberish; it meant nothing; yet the sound of it and the archaic style of it filled me with an intolerable horror.

"To ye contract elsewhere recorded, I, John Grymlann, herebye sweare by ye Name of ye Nameless One to keep goode faithe. Wherefore do I now write in blood these wordes spoken to me in thys grim & silent chamber in ye dedde citie of Koth, whereto no mortal manne hath attained but mee. These same wordes now writ down by mee to be rede over my bodie at ye appointed tyme to fulfill my parte of ye bargain which I entered intoe of mine own free will & knowledge beinge of rite mynd & fiftie years of age this yeare of 1680, A. D. Here begynneth ye incantation:

"Before manne was, ye Elder ones were, & even yet their lord dwelleth amonge ye shadows to which if a manne sette his foote he maye not turn vpon his track."

The words merged into a barbaric gibberish as Conrad stumbled through an unfamiliar language—a language faintly suggesting the Phenician, but shuddery with the touch of a hideous antiquity beyond any remembered earthly tongue. One of the candles flickered and went out. I made a move to relight it, but a motion from the silent oriental stayed me. His eyes burned into mine, then shifted back to the still form on the table.

The manuscript had shifted back into its archaic English.

"——And ye mortal which gaineth to ye black citadels of Koth & speaks with ye Darke Lord whose face is hidden, for a price maye he gain hys heartes desire, ryches & knowledge beyond countinge & lyffe beyond mortal span even two hundred & fiftie yeares."

Again Conrad's voice trailed off into unfamiliar gutturals. Another candle went out.

"——Let not ye mortal flynche as ye tyme draweth nigh for payement & ye fires of Hell laye hold vpon ye vytals as the sign of reckoninge. For ye Prince of Darkness taketh hys due in ye endde & he is not to bee cozened. What ye have promised, that shall ye deliver. *Augantha na shuba*——"

At the first sound of those barbaric accents, a cold hand of terror locked about my throat. My frantic eyes shot to the candles and I was not surprized to see another flicker out. Yet there was no hint of any draft to stir the heavy black hangings. Conrad's voice wavered; he drew his hand across his throat, gagging momentarily. The eyes of the oriental never altered.

"——Amonge ye sonnes of men glide strange shadows for ever. Men see ye tracks of ye talones but not ye feete that make them. Over ye souls of men spread great black wingges. There is but one Black Master though men calle hym Sathanas & Beelzebub & Apolleon & Ahriman & Malik Tous——"

MISTS of horror engulfed me. I was dimly aware of Conrad's voice droning on and on, both in English and in that other fearsome tongue whose

horrific import I scarcely dared try to guess. And with stark fear clutching at my heart, I saw the candles go out, one by one. And with each flicker, as the gathering gloom darkened about us, my horror mounted. I could not speak, I could not move; my distended eyes were fixed with agonized intensity on the remaining candle. The silent oriental at the head of that ghastly table was included in my fear. He had not moved nor spoken, but under his drooping lids, his eyes burned with devilish triumph; I knew that beneath his inscrutable exterior he was gloating fiendishly—but why—*why?*

But I *knew* that the moment the extinguishing of the last candle plunged the room into utter darkness, some nameless, abominable thing would take place. Conrad was approaching the end. His voice rose to the climax in gathering crescendo.

"Approacheth now ye moment of payement. Ye ravens are flying. Ye bats winge against ye skye. There are skulls in ye starres. Ye soul & ye bodie are promised and shall bee delivered uppe. Not to ye dust agayne nor ye elements from which springe lyfe——"

The candle flickered slightly. I tried to scream, but my mouth gaped to a soundless yammering. I tried to flee, but I stood frozen, unable even to close my eyes.

"——Ye abysse yawns & ye debt is to paye. Ye light fayles, ye shadows gather. There is no god but evil; no lite but darkness; no hope but doom——"

A hollow groan resounded through the room. *It seemed to come from the robe-covered thing on the table!* That robe twitched fitfully.

"Oh winges in ye black darke!"

I started violently; a faint swish sounded in the gathering shadows. The stir of the dark hangings? It sounded like the rustle of gigantic wings.

"Oh redde eyes in ye shadows! What is promised, what is writ in bloode is fulfilled! Ye lite is gulfed in blackness! Ya—Koth!"

The last candle went out suddenly and a ghastly unhuman cry that came not from my lips or from Conrad's burst unbearably forth. Horror swept over me like a black icy wave; in the blind dark I heard myself screaming terribly. Then with a swirl and a great rush of wind something swept the room, flinging the hangings aloft and dashing chairs and tables crashing to the floor. For an instant an intolerable odor burned our nostrils, a low hideous tittering mocked us in the blackness; then silence fell like a shroud.

Somehow, Conrad found a candle and lighted it. The faint glow showed us the room in fearful disarray—showed us each other's ghastly faces—and showed us the black ebony table—empty! The doors and windows were locked as they had been, but the oriental was gone—and so was the corpse of John Grimlan.

Shrieking like damned men we broke down the door and fled frenziedly down the well-like staircase where the darkness seemed to clutch at us with clammy black fingers. As we tumbled down into the lower hallway, a lurid glow cut the darkness and the scent of burning wood filled our nostrils.

THE outer doorway held momentarily against our frantic assault, then gave way and we hurtled into the outer starlight. Behind us the flames leaped up with a crackling roar as we fled down the hill. Conrad, glancing over his shoulder, halted suddenly, wheeled and flung up his arms like a madman, and screamed, "Soul and body he sold to Malik Tous, who is Satan, two hundred and fifty years ago! This was the night

of payment—and my God—look! *Look!* The Fiend has claimed his own!"

I looked, frozen with horror. Flames had enveloped the whole house with appalling swiftness, and now the great mass was etched against the shadowed sky, a crimson inferno. And above the holocaust hovered a gigantic black shadow like a monstrous bat, and from its dark clutch dangled a small white thing, like the body of a man, dangling limply. Then, even as we cried out in horror, it was gone and our dazed gaze met only the shuddering walls and blazing roof which crumpled into the flames with an earth-shaking roar.

The Vaunsburg Plague

By JULIUS LONG

Overnight it struck, that dread ray which turned vigorous young men and women into doddering, senile creatures in a few seconds—and lured a great European Dictator to the U. S. to use the ray for his own purposes

I AM only a lawyer, not a scientist, and when the first news of the scourge at Vaunsburg broke upon the world, my reaction was precisely that of any layman. I was frightened. The thing which had happened in Vaunsburg might occur anywhere else. The complete inability of science to discover its origin, the wholesale failure to comprehend the nature of the disease, brought a feeling of abject helplessness to all mankind. Humanity in the face of this catastrophe could not deny that the thing men fear most is not death, nor pain, nor loss of loved ones, but simply old age.

Nothing could be more appalling than the sudden, overnight transformation of a normal city of twenty thousand into a city of the aged. When this happened in Vaunsburg, the world was stunned. It tried not to believe, to discredit the reports. But the thousands of withered and aged victims who streamed dazedly from the doomed city were horrible exhibits in proof that the thing was actually true.

Whole families of these miserable unfortunates tottered about the countryside in search of food and drink, only to be turned empty-handed from door to door. Ignorance of the nature of the disease, of course, was responsible for this inhumanity. It was not then realized that the plague was non-contagious, that it might be acquired only within the confines of the city of Vaunsburg. This fact was soon made manifest by the fate of those daring investigators of science and the press who went into the city in search of facts. One and all these men came away mutilated by age, victims of the senile sickness that claimed their minds and bodies within an hour after their inhabitation of the dread city.

Many of the foremost scientific minds of our time were sacrificed in this futile search for the genesis of the plague. Scientists found their brains enfeebled, their memories destroyed by senile de-

mentia before they were able to make the least progress in the study of the disease. So great became this increasing loss to society that by Presidential proclamation the city of Vaunsburg was at last shut off from the world by a cordon of National Guardsmen who kept a twenty-four hour vigil to see that no one strayed into the plagued city. Only a handful of people now remained there.

During those early days of the plague the world lived in a fear that was almost a panic. Scare rumors were rampant. The plague was supposed to have broken out here, there, everywhere, until almost every corner of the globe had given out its false alarms. New York, only a hundred miles from Vaunsburg, was virtually hysterical. Its residents had horrifying visions of a city of seven million aged and withered people groping about the streets with the aimlessness of those who arise from sleep to find their lives spent.

Especially disconcerting was the occasional sight of a family of refugees

"In one minute it was over."

from the city of the plague. Nothing could be more grotesque than the spectacle of a father and a mother, bent and withered, leading by their bony hands children whose shoulders drooped with the decrepitude of senility, whose curls hung in grayed strands about emaciated cheeks and toothless mouths.

Sober minds reflected that these horrible manifestations of the disease veiled its deeper significance. A race overtaken by the senile sickness would not reproduce. Perhaps the end of civilization was at hand. However, the lapse of a few weeks altered the attitude of these pessimists. The plague broke out nowhere else. It seemed to be peculiarly fixed in Vaunsburg.

The world was able to assume a philosophical air. Optimism supplanted fear. Many leaders in both press and pulpit propounded the convenient theory that the plague of Vaunsburg had been a miracle, an act of Providence. They pointed out that when the news of the scourge had paralyzed the world, it had been on the verge of war. In their common fear the nations had sheathed their swords. Perhaps, we thought, the Vaunsburg plague had been an ill wind that had blown a great good. It had served its purpose, and we should fear it no longer. The solution to the problem lay simply in the isolation of the doomed city of Vaunsburg from the outside world.

It was then that I received my phone call from Bronson.

My first inclination at hearing the sound of his voice was to consign him to the devil and hang up. It seemed perfectly obvious that he and his daughter, Virginia, had played me for a colossal sucker.

The old man had come into my office nearly a year ago, bringing his lovely daughter with him. I confess that if she had not been along when he consulted me, I would have told him point-blank that he had no case and sent him packing. But my interest in the sweetly beautiful Virginia prevailed over my better judgment.

Bronson belonged to that vast multitude of complaining people who, unable to look after their own economic interests, blame their failure upon the wickedness of the laws. Bronson's case is an excellent example of this attitude. For years he had been in the engineering department of the largest electric corporation in the world. He had drawn a straight salary for his services, a clause in his contract providing that for every patent taken out by the company for an invention of his creation, he should be paid the nominal sum of one dollar. For forty years this arrangement had been satisfactory to Bronson. In that time he had served his company profitably, having been responsible for no less than four hundred and eighteen patents, many of which resulted in stupendous profits. For each of these patents Bronson, of course, received one dollar.

He now wished to sue the corporation for compensation commensurate with the value of these patents. He was an old man, he told me, and he was concerned with the fate of his daughter. I saw his point, but was inclined to tell him that a girl as lovely as Virginia Bronson should fare well in this world.

Of course Bronson had no legal claim against the electric company. I told him this, but promised to see what could be done on his behalf. After considerable effort I managed to stage a meeting between my client and the directors of the corporation. It was a touching spectacle, old Bronson sitting there at one end of the table, Virginia by his side, while rows of well-tailored multi-millionaires sat uneasily in his presence. To make a long

story short, I shamed that bunch of plutocrats into giving Bronson what was termed a "bonus" of fifty thousand dollars. I gave this sum in its entirety to my client, not deducting a fee.

I thought I had done a splendid turn, but manifestly Bronson felt otherwise. He accepted the check gingerly, pulled his faded felt hat down over his whitened head and sullenly left my office. Had it not been for Virginia, who was mortified by her father's lack of gratitude, I should have been highly indignant. I had been seeing the girl a good deal since she had first come into my office. One need not be a psychologist to guess why I had exerted myself so much on her father's behalf and refused to accept a fee.

I had a dinner date with Virginia that evening. That afternoon I bought a ring. When I called at the Bronsons' hotel I was told that the girl and her father had left town. They had given the clerk no forwarding address. I heard nothing from them afterward.

Well, I had taken a nice ride, and I laughed it off sourly. All I asked was never to hear from Virginia Bronson or her father again.

And now Bronson was on the phone, calling on a long-distance line.

"WHAT do you want?" I demanded curtly.

"I need your services," he answered quietly. "I need them tonight. It is a matter of the greatest importance, and you can fix your own fee."

I was curious.

"Very well," I said. "Come to my apartment, and I will see you."

"No," said Bronson in that same level tone, "you must come to me."

The devil I would! I had no intention of leaving my comfortable apartment this night. But curiosity caused me to question him further.

"Where are you?" I asked.

"Vaunsburg."

"Vaunsburg!" I fairly shouted. I wondered if Bronson had gone mad.

"Yes," he replied calmly, "Vaunsburg. Of course I am phoning from Sanderstown, five miles away. But in a few moments I shall return to Vaunsburg, where I have left Virginia. She——"

"Virginia!" I shouted into the phone. "Do you mean to tell me that you have taken her to that damnable place? Why, you ought to be——"

"Easy!" Bronson cut me short. "No harm has come to Virginia, and no harm will come to you if you follow my instructions. You see, I control the plague."

My brain whirled. Could Bronson be speaking the truth? Though skeptical, I thought it probable that he was.

"Tell me," I said in a tone that was almost pleading, "have you really found a way to put a stop to that horrible thing? If you have, I'll do anything you say to help you, to bring your discovery before the world."

"I told you," said Bronson, a hint of weariness in his voice, "that I control the plague. Now get a pencil and pad so that I can give you detailed instructions as to how to get through the National Guard line."

Hastily I complied, penciled the directions as Bronson gave them to me. He requested imperatively that I carry no searchlight, for fear that I might be observed.

"Are you familiar with the city of Vaunsburg itself?" he asked me, when his instructions with regard to the barrier were complete.

"Yes, I've been there often."

"Good. I shall be waiting for you in the main entrance of the Portage Hotel. Now pay particular attention to what I have to tell you about the element of

time. It is now eight o'clock. You can easily make it from New York to the city limits of Vaunsburg by midnight. If you should happen to get there quicker, wait until midnight before you enter the city. Under no circumstances enter before that hour. Do you understand?"

"Yes," I said, though I failed to see why the time was so important.

"Good. I will give you forty-five minutes to walk to the hotel. No longer. If you are not there by that time, I cannot answer for the consequences. Is everything clear?"

I told him it was. But it was with a confused mind that I hurriedly changed clothes and called for my car.

Doubts assailed me with increasing force, and by the time I had passed through Holland Tunnel, I was almost tempted to turn back. To go to the plagued city of Vaunsburg merely upon a telephoned request seemed the most foolhardy thing in the world. I had no real proof that Bronson was telling the truth, that he actually was able to control the plague. Yet there was a chance that he had succeeded in mastering the dreaded senile sickness, and my duty was clear. Besides, though I ignored its presence, there was in the back of my mind the thought that I might again see Virginia. I sped on into the open country.

Traffic became increasingly scarce as I drew near to Vaunsburg. Within twenty miles of the city I found the roads deserted. I drove toward my destination with the sensation that I was leaving the world, entering a strange, unearthly land. It was shortly after eleven o'clock when I turned down a side road and headed for the spot which Bronson had told me was unguarded.

I FOUND the place as Bronson had described it, and that gave me hope. Moving in the moonless darkness, I made my way under an abandoned culvert and passed beyond the circle of National Guard lights which surrounded the abandoned city. It was almost twelve by the time I had stumbled across fields to the city limits of Vaunsburg. I waited until my watch indicated midnight, then crossed into the land from which no man had returned with his youth.

There were no lights to guide my way, and I had forborne to carry a searchlight. In the utter darkness, I moved from vague memory of the city's streets, hurrying toward its center, ever fearful of Bronson's warning that I must reach the Portage Hotel by forty-five minutes after twelve. The silent houses loomed ominously about me, and deserted automobiles littered the streets. There were, according to reports, a few stragglers still left in the city, but wherever they were now, they were deep in sleep. Once a scrawny dog tottered toward me, but faltered in its path and fell to the pavement. I felt an inclination to go toward it and pat its weary head, but memory of Bronson's instructions sent me callously onward. From time to time I could not resist the temptation to rub my hands together, to feel my face to assure myself that there were no newly formed wrinkles there, that the plague had not gripped me. I could detect no change.

As I neared the center of the city I was beset by a new terror. Suppose all that Bronson had said to me had been lies! The man's inexplicable conduct a year before after I had done him a very great favor indicated that his mind was erratic, that he was not to be trusted. Perhaps he felt that I had sold out his interests to the electric company. A year's brooding over a fancied wrong might have caused him to use this demoniacal scheme to avenge his injury. He might have scoured the National Guard line for days to find that unwatched spot

through which he might send me to my doom. But it was too late to turn back now. I must go on to the finish.

Finally, breathless and perspiring, I arrived at the Portage Hotel. Hope failed me as I found it too in darkness. With a sickening sensation at the pit of my stomach I groped into the pitch-black entrance. A voice called to me from the darkness.

"In here. Quickly."

It was the most welcome voice I have ever heard in my life.

"Bronson!" I shouted.

"Quiet!"

I stared in the direction whence the voice had sounded and made out Bronson's outline as he stood there, holding open the inner door. I entered. Bronson closed the door and locked it.

"This way," he said, producing a small flashlight.

He led me to the stairs, and together we ascended seven flights. The corridor of the eighth and top floor was dimly lighted by feebly burning bulbs fed by loosely strung wires. The electric power plant at Vaunsburg had been dead since the beginning of the plague, and Bronson had apparently rigged up his own lighting-system. I had my first opportunity to get a good look at him.

He had changed little. Though he seemed a trifle thinner and more drawn, it was obvious that he had not fallen prey to the senile sickness. I was exuberant, thrilled. Manifestly Bronson had conquered the disease! His accomplishment would not only give him the scientific recognition he had so long been denied, but would bring him wealth as well.

"Where is Virginia?" I asked.

"You will find her down the corridor in No. 822. No doubt you would like to talk to her alone. When you have finished, I want you both to join me in my laboratory."

He turned down a corridor, and I saw him fumble with a key at a door. I hastened on, found No. 822. My hand trembled as I rapped upon the door.

"Come in."

It was Virginia's voice. I entered.

VIRGINIA stood in the center of the room, her dark hair accentuating the pallor of her gravely composed face. Though still beautiful the girl had subtly matured, and I knew intuitively that for many months past her life had been troubled. I was also keenly aware of the difficulty of my position. I resolved to behave as if nothing had ever happened between us. Abruptly a sound from below broke the awkward silence. I recognized the sound as the low hum of a dynamo. Then I became aware that Virginia had turned deathly pale, was holding her hands to her ears.

"Virginia," I said, "what is it? What is the matter?"

Her lips trembled. Her voice was hoarse and unrecognizable.

"Oh, my God! The machine! It's going again!"

"What machine?"

For a moment Virginia stared incredulously.

"Didn't my father tell you? Didn't he tell you about the thing downstairs, the machine he brought you here to sell for him?"

I shook my head.

"But, Virginia, this must be the device your father has invented to control the plague! Don't you understand? It will save the world from the worst plague it has ever known—and it will make him rich and famous. Certainly you can stand the humming for a little while."

Virginia stared perplexedly into my

eyes. Slowly she advanced and clasped my shoulders in her hands.

"Don't you really know? Didn't my father really tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

Virginia released her grip, turned and walked to a lounge, where she wearily seated herself. Her eyes fixed upon infinity, she released her thunderbolt.

"The machine does not *control* the senile sickness. It *causes* it!"

I moved to a chair and sat down. I tried to think. What Virginia had just told me was incredible; yet I believed that it was true. I recalled how her father had evaded my question when I had asked him if he had found a way to stop the plague. He had simply said: "I control the plague."

"Tell me, Virginia, what has happened?"

She avoided my eyes.

"Father will tell you all there is to know. He wants us to go to the laboratory."

I got up from the chair.

"Let us go at once."

We spoke no word as we walked down the dimly lighted corridors. The thing that Bronson had done stunned me, left me incapable of fathoming what his motive could possibly be.

We found him in his laboratory, engaged with what I took to be an X-ray machine. Though it was an X-ray machine of small size, it looked top-heavy on its slender frame. Bronson left it and lighted a cigarette. His eyes questioned Virginia. She nodded resignedly.

"Perhaps," Bronson said, drawing upon his cigarette, "you are beginning to understand the nature of my control over the plague. I had no time to explain over the telephone."

"Is it true," I asked, "that you are responsible for what has happened?"

"It is."

"My God, man! What motive could you have had?"

"The best in the world," Bronson replied calmly. "My motive is a desire to leave my daughter the wealth she deserves."

"But what of the fifty thousand dollars I got for you?"

Bronson laughed derisively.

"Do you call that wealth? That was nothing! It was only a means to an end. The world owes me a debt a thousand times greater than that.

"I see you are skeptical. Well, let me tell you, there aren't enough adding-machines in the world to calculate the benefits to mankind brought by the inventions I received a dollar apiece for. A laborer is worthy of his hire. If the laws provide me with no way to collect my just dues, I will collect them myself in my own way.

"I have brought you here because you have shown yourself capable of dealing with the one man who can pay the price I ask. Besides, there is another consideration. My daughter will have great wealth, more wealth than that of any other woman in the world. She will need someone to take care of it for her. The solution of the problem is apparent. You love Virginia; she loves you. I am willing that you share the wealth that will be hers."

"Why," I asked Virginia, "did you run away without a word to me?"

"I am afraid I am responsible for that," Bronson said quickly. "I apologize for my seeming want of gratitude. You see, I was impatient. The money you had wangled for me gave me the opportunity I had so long awaited. Let me explain.

"Many years ago in the electric company's laboratory I made a discovery. It

was not one of the four hundred and eighteen patents taken out by the company. It was the result of a bit of disinterested research that the company would never have ordered. My discovery was the result of tireless experiments with the common X-ray tube, at that time but recently invented. An ordinary X-ray, of course, causes the rapid completion of the life cycle of a cell. My modified X-ray, obtained by use of electric current of high frequency and a new gas within the tube itself, causes the rapid completion of the life of an animal up to a certain stage of senility, beyond which the ray seems to have no further effect. After much experimentation I was able to age animal life at will. That first modified ray-tube, which I built many years ago, you see now."

Bronson indicated the thing which I had assumed was an X-ray machine.

"Certainly," I said in wonder, "that thing isn't responsible for what happened to the entire city of Vaunsburg!"

"No, it is not. But let me continue.

"The use of the ray was a problem which at first I could not solve. It seemed to have no practical purpose—none, at any rate, from which I could derive an income. I toyed with the idea that governments might use the ray for penal purposes. How simple it would be to let a convict serve a twenty-year sentence in an hour's time, or in a minute, according to the intensity of the ray! But reflection caused me to abandon the idea. The hypocrisy of society would abhor it. An offender against the law is not merely to be punished, he must be given time to reform! And though my ray could rob a man of his life quite as effectively as a prison, there would be no time in which he could learn respect for the sacred laws.

"Years passed, and I had long ago reached the conclusion that my ray possessed only academic worth. Then approaching old age opened my eyes to its value. Daily I grew more fearful of that specter. It occurred to me that old age was the most frightful thing in the world. And suddenly it dawned on me that the power to inflict that horror was the most terrible power a man might exercise. I possessed that power.

"In my hands it was feeble. It required a ruthless wielder, a dictator of men. In war-torn Europe that man had arisen. Here, I told myself, was a man who would pay more dearly than any other for the power I held. I resolved to see him at once.

"I QUIT my job at the electric company and traveled to Europe. For months I endeavored to see the one man who more than any other would want my ray. Fear of assassination had flung a multiplicity of barriers around his person. Audience with him was virtually impossible to obtain, and I would reveal my secret to no other man. At last my opportunity came. After haunting his official headquarters for nearly a year I was given five minutes in his presence.

"In that short time I could not explain the full possibilities of my ray. The great Dictator was unimpressed. 'A nasty little toy,' he dismissed it. I had no time to explain how it might be used on a large scale, how huge ray-tubes rotated in dirigibles would age whole civilian populations in a few minutes. I could not convince him that ray-tubes installed in tanks could age armies before them. The Dictator listened with the stupid indifference that military men have always displayed toward improvements in the arms of war. When the five minutes were up I was dragged from his presence. I shouted that he should hear from me again.

"But one thing remained for me to do. I must make a gigantic senility-tube

capable of emiting a ray powerful enough to affect a city with a radius of several miles. This required thousands of dollars, which I did not have. You got them for me. I have built my tube, and you are familiar with the consequences."

"My God!" I said, "do you mean to tell me that you have robbed twenty thousand people of their lives just to demonstrate your ray?"

"That's the idea," said Bronson, thrusting a fresh cigarette between his thin lips.

I simply stared at the man. To argue with him, to evoke reason I knew to be futile. He had a fixed idea, an obsession, and only a fool would fling feeble arguments against that stone wall. He believed that his services to mankind justified anything he might do to it.

I turned to Virginia. "You didn't try to stop this?"

"You know I did! But I could do nothing with him."

"Yes," interjected Bronson, "she tried hard enough to talk me out of my rights. She is like most children who do not appreciate what their parents do for them."

"Tell me," I said, "where is this senility ray?"

"On the floor below. It rotates at the rate of sixty revolutions a minute. If the ray were to be left stationary, it would dry a man to skin and bones in a minute's time. I chose to place it here because this is the tallest building in the city. The ray is focused upon all below the level of this floor and covers a radius of three miles. I warn you not to venture downstairs so long as you hear the dynamo which feeds the ray-tube. I will turn it off at three o'clock when he comes."

"When who comes?"

"The man to whom you are to sell the secret of the ray."

"Who is that man?"

Bronson enjoyed the effect as he uttered a name.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Not he, himself?"

"Yes. The mountain has come to Mahomet. The very man who had me dragged bodily from his presence has come all the way across the ocean to pay me the price I shall ask for my 'nasty little toy'."

"But that's incredible! If his people knew that he had left the country they would rise and turn out his band of bloodthirsty butchers!"

"Nevertheless he is in this country. I talked to him on the phone only a few minutes before I called you. Two days after my so-called plague broke out I cabled him. He immediately cabled back that he was ready to talk business. He tried to trick me into bringing my portable ray-tube into his country, but I held out, and now he is coming here. Think of it! I have the greatest tyrant in the world at my feet!"

I was not so sure.

"You have a formidable opponent," I said. "And the mere mechanical end of such a huge transaction presents tremendous difficulties. How much do you intend to make the man pay?"

"Not less than a half-billion dollars in the best issues of the bonds of the United States, England and France."

I sat back in my chair and eyed Bronson fixedly.

"Just exactly how much do you think these bonds will be worth a month after your ray is in the hands of the Dictator?"

"What do you mean?" asked Bronson naively.

"Simply this: Once your ray is in the hands of the Dictator, the bonds of all other governments will not be worth the paper they're printed on. All governments will collapse before the Dictator if he is given control of the ray."

Perplexed, Bronson shrugged.

"In that case, you must convert the

bonds and invest the proceeds for me where it will be safe."

"That is a large order. But even if I were able to do what you request in the time allowed, do you think the world would be a fit place for you and your daughter? Why, Virginia might be one of the Dictator's first civilian victims."

"No," said Bronson confidently, "the world will be a better place with so much power in the hands of one man. Which was the more successful in maintaining peace, the Pax Romana or the League of Nations? I look forward to a world state where fear of one man's power binds all peoples together."

I recognized the futility of arguing against such idle speculation. I chose a more practical line.

"How do you intend to arrange the exchange of your ray for the bonds? You are dealing with a dangerous man."

"I have anticipated the obstacles involved," Bronson replied. "I want to familiarize you with my plan during the next two hours so that you will understand it thoroughly when the Dictator arrives."

I looked Bronson squarely in the eye.

"I refuse to help you and will prevent the sale of the ray if it is in my power to do so."

BRONSON regarded me as if I were a stubborn child.

"I want to assure you right now that there is nothing you can do to stop me. Virginia will bear me out. I alone know where the control switch to the ray-tube is located. The ray-tube cannot be reached unless the switch is thrown. If you were to try to pass below this floor you would be rendered a doddering old man without even the capacity to remember what you had come to do. And if you reached the door with all your faculties intact you would find it locked by a combination lock which only I can open. I hope you realize that I am complete master here."

"I doubt that very much," said a low, alien voice.

The three of us turned quickly, saw a squinting little man standing in the doorway. He held his hands clasped together in a pious fashion and might have been mistaken for an elder in a church. But there was no mistaking the features of the squinting little face. It was a face known and despised over the civilized world.

Bronson breathed a name.

"Yes, it is I. Please forgive my early arrival. I was so impatient to renew our acquaintance."

Europe's hated Dictator stepped into the room. Immediately behind him followed two formidable figures who had been invisible in the dim light. They towered well over six feet in height and manifestly were members of the Dictator's famous Gray Guard. Each held a heavy Lüger pistol as if it were part of his hand.

When Bronson spoke, his voice was strained and incredulous.

"Tell me how you got by the ray and into the building. I thought the ray was impassable."

The Dictator regarded him with a patronizing smile.

"That we were able to come here is no reflection on your ray," he said. "It is merely a reflection on your good judgment. Did you think for an instant that I was prepared to purchase the ray upon your own terms? Do you think that is how I rose from the slums to become the savior of my people? No, my friend, I will deal fairly with you, but on my own terms."

Bronson stared perplexedly.

"I don't understand."

"You erred in communicating with

Norton here. For weeks, ever since you cabled me, my operatives in this country have tapped the wires of every man and woman with whom you have ever come in contact. Your call to Norton tonight was reported to me, and when your friend entered the city he was not alone as he thought."

I started.

"Yes, young man, we crossed into the city only a short distance away from you. We made better time. We were able to enter the hotel at the rear and make our way up the stairs before you arrived at the front entrance. We have been in no hurry to make our presence known, and our patience has been well rewarded. For some time we have been entertained by Mr. Bronson's fascinating story. So, my friend, you have the greatest tyrant in the world at your feet?"

"You will never get away with this!" Bronson said hoarsely. "I alone know where the switch to the ray downstairs is, and I will never let you pass below this floor!"

The Dictator regarded him smilingly.

"That is a little detail which we have taken care of," he said. "Indeed, the reason for our haste in reaching this place was to locate your age-dealing machine and put it out of business. The dynamo still runs downstairs, but you may be assured that the ray-tube does not function."

Bronson tried to maintain a firm countenance, but I saw, and the Dictator saw, with a malicious little twinkle in his squinting eyes, that Bronson was a defeated man.

"That is a better way to look at it," he said. "As for my part of the bargain, I am prepared to be generous."

From an inner pocket he produced a slip of paper which he handed to the armed guard on his right. Carefully holding his Lüger, the man approached Bronson and handed him the paper. Bronson's lips trembled as he read.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. "Why, it cost me that much to build the big ray-tube!"

"I surmised as much," said the Dictator. "That is why I am willing to reimburse you. I believe in nothing if not fair play."

Bronson allowed the check to slip from his fingers as he sagged back against a work-bench. In impotent despair his head shook from side to side.

"Now that I have done my part of the bargain," the Dictator announced curtly, "I will ask you to do yours. First we must have a demonstration of your small ray-tube. I did not come this far to carry away a defective product."

"I—I have no more guinea-pigs," Bronson faltered.

The Dictator's brows arched, then he looked from one to another of the three of us until his eyes fell on my own. He smiled at me in a way that made my spine freeze.

"Perhaps Norton will oblige us. Hans, bring the lawyer forward."

The armed man at the Dictator's left approached me, the Lüger pistol aimed in his hand.

I won't attempt to describe my feelings when the Dictator's purpose sank into my skull. I do know that in the fraction of a second it took the man called Hans to reach me the shirt on my back became soaked with icy sweat. I had always thought that I feared death by fire worse than any other torture that could happen to man, but I would gladly have plunged into a blazing volcano before submitting to the fate that the squinting little devil had planned for me. I knew that it was no use to plead for mercy. For the first time the psychology of the Dictator was thrust home to me. It was easy now to comprehend how such an unprepossess-

ing, contemptible little man had gone so far. Here was the man Machiavelli wrote about, a man utterly indifferent to all standards of private morality, sacrificing all human feelings to gain his end.

Hans had reached me now, and I was determined to smear his wooden face with at least one blow, though his bullets would rip out my heart.

"No, no!" Bronson cried hoarsely. "I won't have it! I'll destroy you all before I deliberately focus the ray on this man!"

The Dictator reflected. He had won his victory over Bronson, he knew. To madden him further might cost him all he had won. Only Bronson understood the ray, and once he got to the controls, in blind desperation he might make good his threat to destroy all in the room.

"Hold on, Hans," the Dictator said, "I have changed my mind."

He turned and surveyed the other armed bodyguard thoughtfully. His thin lips pursed womanly as he came to a conclusion.

"Boris," he said, "it is necessary that the ray-tube be demonstrated. You will please subject yourself to the ray."

THE giant foreigner listened dumbly. Slowly his eyes widened as comprehension came to him. For a second he stared helplessly about, his eyes even beseeching Virginia and me as if we were able to intercede for him. Then abruptly his heels clicked together, and he came to attention. The Dictator relieved him of his gun.

"Proceed with the experiment," he said to Bronson.

Bronson cast an inquiring look at the Dictator, saw only vain triumph in his squinting eyes. With an almost imperceptible shrug he moved to the machine and adjusted the control dials.

"No tricks, if you want your daughter to live," the Dictator warned.

"Stand over here," Bronson said to Boris, without looking at him. His manner was as casual as that of a photographer about to take a picture.

Boris moved obediently to the spot indicated. His heels clicked as he came to attention. The smug gleam of pride lighted the Dictator's eyes as he watched this amazing exhibition of blind devotion. I saw Virginia turn her back to the scene. Hans looked on dumbly.

"I will make it as quick as possible," Bronson told Boris, who eyed the ray-machine with grim fixity.

Boris saluted sharply as the switch was thrown.

"To the Fatherland!"

In one minute it was over. In sixty seconds we saw a powerful man in the prime of his life crumble into decrepitude. The lines of time formed about his face, which lost its strength in ghastly flabbiness. The hair of his head whitened, and his magnificent body shrank and bent. But most horrible of all was the piteous stare of the age-mutilated creature when the ordeal was over and the switch was thrown open. He looked about feebly, his faded eyes passing over us as though he had never seen us before. Lost, stunned, he groped to a chair. He sat there, held his wrinkled head in his bony hands and stared with rheumy eyes into space.

The Dictator made a statement.

"Boris was a brave man and a patriot. I shall see that he is awarded the Cross of Victory, First Class."

I looked into the eye of the gigantic Hans, who still covered me with the Lüger. Did I only imagine that I saw doubt in that obedient face?

"Well," asked Bronson wearily, "are you satisfied?"

The Dictator nodded.

"There remains but one difficulty. If I leave now with the ray-machine I have

no assurance that you will not sell its secret to someone else. Therefore I must eliminate that possibility."

The Dictator did not wait for the puzzled Bronson to comprehend the full import of his words. He simply raised the gun in his hand and fired point-blank at the inventor.

Bronson clutched his chest, eyed the Dictator in dumb bewilderment. Then, as a convulsion seized him, he turned his piteous gaze to Virginia. He regarded her with abject humility. His eyes sought forgiveness, seemed to implore that she try to understand that all he had tried to do had been for her.

Virginia, too stunned at first by the rapidity of the Dictator's cruel action to utter a sound, now gave a low moan as she rushed to her father. As she reached him he collapsed to the floor. She dropped to her knees and took him in her arms.

My action was spontaneous, without thought. Before I was aware of what I was doing, my arm swept down upon Hans' wrist and knocked the gun from his hand.

The man's recovery was instant. He lunged toward me, swinging. I ducked to one side, let him go by off balance and drove a rabbit punch into the back of his fat neck. He went down. I stooped for the gun, got my fingers on it. Then I was thrown from my feet as Hans, still on his knees, flung his arms around my legs. The gun went off in my hand. Hans released his grip and lay still.

Sprawled on my back, I shot a glance upward. The Dictator, anger distorting his little eyes, held his automatic in a bead on my head. It would go off, I knew, before I could bring my gun-hand around. With a horrible certainty that I was about to die, I waited.

I wondered why it didn't come as I returned the Dictator's angry, vindictive glare. And then I saw that something was happening to him. The features of his face became subtly transformed. Though the look of anger was frozen there, inner puzzlement was manifesting itself. Did I imagine that the Dictator looked older, grayer?

He let his gaze waver to one side, then uttered a shrill, womanly scream. Instantly I swung my gun-hand around, got to my knees.

But there was no need to fear the Dictator now. He was a contemptible figure of abject terror, and as my eyes followed his own, I saw why.

An age-mutilated figure stood beside the ray-machine. It was the figure of Boris, who must have summoned his last remnant of strength to reach the thing that had left him a gray husk. With one hand he held the machine, to support his weight. With the other he directed the ray-tube at the man for whom a few moments ago he had sacrificed his life. A look of horrible disillusionment which seemed to reflect the ultimate revolt of a browbeaten people shone with holy fury in the avenger's eyes.

The Dictator shrieked a vain plea, then with trembling, ill-responding fingers aimed the Lüger and fired. He fired not once but a half-dozen times into that aged body. The bullets seemed to have no effect as the specter-like figure absorbed their steel. Screaming, the Dictator hurled the weapon at the ray-machine, missed. He turned, started in frantic flight to the doorway.

In the doorway he fell. Struggling desperately to crawl away, he merely writhed ineffectually, whimpering in protest against his fate. Before my eyes he became transformed from a ruler of men to a horribly repulsive creature with a livid, degenerate face that spewed with its distorted lips a squeaky, childish gib-

berish in impotent despair. Fascinated, I stared until the writhing thing, whimpering almost inaudibly, lay back and was quiet.

I turned my eyes to Boris. He surveyed his victim a brief, triumphant second, then clutched the ray-machine with both hands as blood oozed from a half-dozen holes in his body. The top-heavy machine tottered, then fell over with a crash. A dead man, Boris fell clear of it to the floor.

I moved toward Virginia, who still held her father in her arms. A sheet of flame burst between us. I stepped backward, saw that, in crashing, the ray-machine had been shorted. I smelled burning insulation as flames shot from its interior.

Rapidly I skirted the flames, got to Virginia's side. I took Bronson's wrist in my hand. There was no pulse. The blaze behind me seared my back. I seized Virginia firmly by her shoulders and lifted her to her feet. She sobbed, struggled to loosen my grip.

"Don't you see?" I pleaded. "The place is on fire. We can't stay here."

I did not exaggerate. The flames from the ray-machine had ignited the inflammable materials in the laboratory. A whole section of it blazed furiously, and the single doorway was threatened.

"But my father——"

I held Virginia close.

"I'm sorry. We can do nothing for him now."

By main force I got her to the doorway, stumbled over the body that lay sprawled there. Impatiently I bent over it, found it dead. I hurried Virginia to the stairs.

In the street a wind swirled vigorously. Without a fire department the city would be razed in a matter of hours. All traces of the mad ambition of Bronson would be destroyed. The fate of Europe's tyrant would be a mystery never to be revealed.

It was with a certain satisfaction that I led Virginia from the doomed city, never permitting her to glance backward as I held her close.

The Beggar

By FRANCES ELLIOTT

All day the beggar on a sun-drenched stone
Barters his jests for paltriness of coins;
At dusk he winds a sash about his loins
And mounts his poppied throne of dreams, alone.
He jousts with tigers under magic skies,
And knows the joy that fantasy purloins,
A glinting mask of star-dust on his eyes.

The Poppy Pearl

By FRANK OWEN

A glamorous, exotic tale of a wild adventure in the South Seas, an opium-ship, and a naked golden girl on a coral island

ON THE eve of his wedding Guy Sellers disappeared as completely as though the earth had yawned and swallowed him up. He was last seen leaving the Logue Club, where he had given a farewell dinner to a few intimate friends. It turned out to be more of a farewell dinner than anyone imagined.

It was six months before Gloria Lee saw him again. Then, as abruptly as he went, Guy Sellers returned.

"I have had an awful experience," he told her. "I have suffered torture." He shuddered as he spoke and drew his hand across his eyes as though he would blot out the sight which his memory conjured up for him.

She placed her hand upon his arm. "If it makes you feel so bad," she said softly, "do not speak of it."

"I must," he cried. "After the way I have treated you I owe you an explanation. The story I have to tell is so odd you will scarcely credit it."

Again he hesitated for a moment before he continued.

"After I left the boys that night at the Logue Club I decided that I would walk home. It was a charming evening and I set off at a brisk gait up Fifth Avenue. Although it was not much after midnight, the avenue above Sixtieth Street was almost deserted. Suddenly I gazed down a side street and saw the figure of a man lying by the curbstone. At once I went to his assistance. As I did so a veritable giant of a man came forward also.

" 'We'd better get a cab,' he said, bending over the prostrate form; 'this fellow seems to be pretty well knocked out.'

"Even as he spoke, a taxi drew up alongside the curb; which somewhat surprized me, for neither of us had summoned one. The next moment we had lifted the man into the taxi. Then an unexpected thing happened. He suddenly came to consciousness and springing to his feet, pressed a handkerchief over my mouth. Meanwhile the other threw his arms about my body, pinning me down until I was helpless. At the same time there came to my nostrils a peculiar though not unpleasant odor, and I grew very tired. My eyes closed in spite of all my efforts to stay awake. I was well aware that I was in a most precarious position, that I was being doped and carried away. Yet sleep came to me and I did not care.

"When I awoke, everything was as black as pitch about me. I had no idea where I was. In a panic I put out my hands in all directions, but I could feel no walls. I rose to my feet and started to run in the blackness, as though by so doing I could shake it off. The floor rose and fell as though it were moving. Twice I almost fell, and once, unable to save myself, crashed to the floor over some protruding object and struck my head a stunning blow. At that moment there came an unearthly shriek and something cold and dank brushed against my hand. It seemed as large as a cat, al-

though of this I was not sure, for in the blackness only its shining eyes were visible.

"With a cry I sprang to my feet and stood trembling, afraid to move. The floor rose and fell rhythmically. Without doubt I was on a ship, a ship infested with rats and other vermin. For what reason I was imprisoned in that gruesome hold I did not know.

"I was interrupted in my musings by a ray of light which appeared above my head. The next moment a hatch had been removed, and far above I could see the blue of the sky. By the position of the sun I knew that it was nearly midday. I had evidently been unconscious for many hours.

"And now there appeared the most peculiar-looking individual I have ever beheld. He dropped down into the hold as though he were a gorilla, not deigning to use the ladder. His face was repulsively ugly. His eyes, wide apart, were separated by a nose so broad and flat it was simian. His protruding chin resembled a cup, a great wart underneath taking the place of a handle. His mouth was enormous, as though it had been slit from ear to ear in infancy, just as was done in

"A girl who blended with sunsets and soft, warm music."

Old Paris to make permanent grinning jesters for the kings. But the eyes were the most repulsive feature in the face. They were as small as those of a hog, and rheumy rings of inflammation encircled them. For a moment this monstrosity of a man stood and surveyed me as though I were some new species of insect.

"At last he spoke, and his voice was as great a shock to me as his appearance. There was a note of culture in the tone, and he pronounced his words perfectly.

" 'My name is Jolly Cauldron,' he said, 'and I'm captain of this ship. You're one of the new hands, and you're going to do as I say.'

"In the tone there was no animosity. He simply took it for granted that I would bow to his wishes. Naturally I rebelled against this.

" 'I refuse to be treated like a dog,' I told him.

"He threw back his head and laughed heartily, as though I had told him the rarest joke. But as quickly as the fit of merriment seized him it passed, and his eyes narrowed until they were only points. The next moment his arm shot out, caught me on the tip of the jaw and sent me sprawling in a limp heap a dozen feet away. At that moment, mercifully, darkness closed in again. As consciousness slipped from me I seemed to hear Jolly Cauldron's laugh echoing as from a great distance.

"How long I remained unconscious I do not know, for the next thing I remember was my head throbbing as though it would burst. My tongue was parched, and my body burned with fever; yet on my brow was not the slightest sign of moisture. My flesh was baked dry. Over my body countless rats scampered. They paid no more attention to me than if I had been part of the flooring. I was stifling. All air seemed to have been sucked from that hold.

"Again the hatch opened and Jolly Cauldron climbed down the rope ladder. He carried a jug of water and a bowl of food. Although it was composed of boiled pork and greenish potatoes, to me it looked appetizing.

"Jolly Cauldron kicked me in the chest. 'Well, how's the dog?' he cried.

"He placed the food and water on the floor a short distance from me. I tried to rise but could not. I was chained to the floor.

" 'Until a dog's well trained,' grinned Jolly Cauldron, 'it's a wise precaution to keep him tied up.'

"That hour was one of intense agony. Jolly Cauldron left the hatch open so that I could be a spectator of the events that followed. The rats came out of the darkness in swarms and attacked the food. In their haste and gluttony they even attacked one another. My tongue was hanging out. I'd have committed any crime merely for the privilege of wetting my lips.

"Jolly Cauldron returned and shook his fist at me. 'What do you say, dog?' he cried. 'Are you willing to obey me now?'

"In a voice that was almost a moan I admitted that I was, so he released me and led me up the hatchway to the crew's quarters. A more filthy place could not have been imagined. The cabin was swarming with vermin. The floor was covered with litter, chunks of biscuit, empty beef-tins, bits of decaying pork and wads of tobacco. Yet to me after my confinement in the rat-ridden hold it was not repulsive.

"In the days that followed I learned quite a bit of seamanship. I was on a four-masted schooner, *The Poppy Pearl*, and we were bound for China. The crew were opium-smugglers. Jolly Cauldron

held them on that ship with a force as strong as bars of iron. Every member of the crew was an opium fiend and each night, in lieu of pay, he received a little round pellet of the drug. I wish I could describe the weird character of those nights. The forecastle reeked with opium fumes. Usually I slipped into slumber, into a semi-stupor with the sweet deadly perfume in my nostrils. Sometimes I would have the wildest dreams. I walked on the bottom of the sea through caverns filled with gold and jewels. From such fantasies I disliked to awaken, for I always rose with a nauseating taste in my mouth. As I strode to the deck I used to glance at my drug-ridden companions. There was a look of profound repose on every face, even though crawling things were gliding unmolested over the inert forms.

"Much happened on that ship that I should like to relate, but if I did it would be like singing an endless, mournful chantey of the sea. Day followed day, week followed week in utter monotony. On all that ship there were no two men who trusted each other, no two who were even casual friends. They had known all the horrors and hatreds of life, and their faith in things was utterly shattered. Gradually I grew as crafty as the rest. I fawned over Jolly Cauldron, became a thing of the most despicable hyprocrisy.

"Far from pleasing him, my new attitude made him hate me the more.

" 'I had thought,' he snarled, 'that you were a thoroughbred. But I was wrong. You're just a mongrel, utterly worthless.' But a day was to come when Jolly Cauldron placed his faith in me above any other man on the ship.

"IT ALL came about because Slim Williams went mad. It was on a certain day after we had been at sea for several months, while we were sailing slowly through the Yellow Sea. For more than a week the temperature had been over a hundred and the humidity was so high we could scarcely breathe. At best Slim Williams was feeble mentally, and when the constant glare of the sun fell upon him, his mind broke completely. He imagined that he was extremely religious, that he had been sent to save *The Poppy Pearl* from destruction. He crept stealthily down into Jolly Cauldron's cabin and seized the steel-bound chest in which the opium was kept. Staggering under its great weight, he returned to the deck. Before any of us could stop him, he had hoisted it over the side and it splashed out of sight into the Yellow Sea.

"Never have I beheld such a frightful expression as was on the face of Jolly Cauldron at that moment. His mouth worked convulsively as though he were having a fit, and his face was gray-white. The inflamed circles about his eyes were red, as red as raw flesh. The next minute his great arms had closed about Slim Williams with such terrific force we could hear the bones crack. Slim moaned slightly and frothed at the lips. For a few seconds only Jolly Cauldron held him thus; then, uttering a long, harsh laugh, he pitched him headlong into the sea. As I stood at the rail I could see the gruesome shadows of sharks circling the ship.

"That night was the hottest I have ever experienced. There was not a breath of air stirring. The water glowed with a peculiar yellow light, caused no doubt by some phosphorescent sea-anemone, but to me it seemed weird and ghastly. In the forecastle the men lay on their bunks, panting for breath, cursing and screaming for their day's pay of opium. A single oil lamp swung from the rafters overhead. The feeble flame of it made the shadows all about us more pro-

nounced. Never have I heard such cursing as I did that night. The fiends were raving for their drug. Without it their nerves ripped like rotted threads.

"Jolly Cauldron summoned me to his cabin.

" 'They're all mad,' he cried and he forced a revolver into my hand. 'Only you and I on this ship are sane. The rest are merely beasts. If they try mutiny we'll shoot them down. It'll be our lives or theirs.'

"For the remainder of the night I crouched in the bow of the schooner. All about us yawned the blackness of death. The humidity was so heavy it formed a veritable mist. We could not see the stars. The moon had not yet risen, and in no direction was there any sign of light save that phosphorescent glare on the waters. The sails hung limp from the yards. We scarcely moved. And as I sat there, despite the weirdness of the night, I dozed. I dreamed that a figure was creeping upon me.

"With a start I opened my eyes. Directly over me stood the gaunt figure of a man. Now the moon had risen and the mists had cleared. It shone on the uplifted blade of a knife. I had no time to reach for my revolver. Spellbound I gazed into the sinister face beyond the knife. It glistened madly in the eery light. Then a shot rang out and the horrible face writhed in agony. Out of the shadows Jolly Cauldron appeared.

" 'Can't even protect yourself!' he sneered; 'merely a worthless mongrel.'

"The following day we stopped at a tiny island, peopled entirely by Chinese. Jolly Cauldron wished to renew his opium supply. So intent was he on his mission that he momentarily forgot my existence. In the excitement I ran away and hid in the hills well back from the coast. Hours later, from a secluded position on a high cliff, I watched *The Poppy Pearl* slip out to sea. She looked very beautiful with all her sails set, racing before the wind. Nothing in her appearance suggested her true character.

"Toward evening that same day I was able to book passage on a Chinese junk bound for Canton. Although the accommodations were far worse than those of steerage passengers on trans-Atlantic liners, I found no fault with them. At least the crawling things were there in fewer numbers. In due course we arrived in Canton, ancient city of mystery, where the East and the West rub shoulders. A few days later I caught a steamer for Shanghai, where I connected with a liner bound for San Francisco. I was on my way back to America and you."

2

Ten days after his arrival in New York, Guy Sellers was married to Gloria Lee. They had given up their plans for a big wedding and only a few intimate friends were present. For their honeymoon they went to England, to a little house in Stanbury Downs far off the beaten track of travel. It lay nestled in a charming garden like a mushroom in the heart of the woods. Mother Grimes, who kept the cottage, was a delightful little old woman who seemed to anticipate their every want.

"I think we should pass up London absolutely," declared Gloria, "and just rusticate here. I'm sure no other spot in England could be more appealing than this."

And yet they did visit London, where, like hordes of others, they were enthralled by the "charm of the antique," the steeples of Sir Christopher Wren, stately Westminster Abbey and legendary London Tower, not to mention the friendly little coffee-houses tucked away in the most outlandish spots and hidden

corners as though they were jocularly playing hide-and-seek with one another. They left London with regret, although they rather looked forward to the peace and quietude of Stanbury Downs.

Then as abruptly as happiness came to them, it was shattered. Without warning, Guy disappeared again. For a week Gloria remained at the little house, but he did not return. So at last she sailed for New York.

In Gloria's mind doubt was taking root. It seemed unnatural for Guy to disappear twice so mysteriously. She was not worried—she was annoyed. In New York she consulted her lawyer, who in turn got into touch with the best detective agencies, but not the slightest trace of Guy could be found.

Thus five months rolled by and then again he returned. He was very thin. His clothes hung upon him like sack-cloth. If he noticed that Gloria was rather cool in her greeting he did not show it.

"ONCE more I have had a most peculiar experience," he told her. "As I walked down Hambleton Road that day in Stanbury Downs I came upon an old woman seated in a carriage that looked as though it might have been the first one ever made. She was driving a horse so thin that it seemed ready to fall apart. Only the skin held its bones together. I am sure that had it not been for the shafts it would have fallen. The old woman was calling shrilly to someone in a cracked querulous voice. I glanced about, and as there was nobody in sight I assumed she was calling to me. So I strode over to her.

" 'Please come with me,' she implored; 'my good man is ill and I think as 'ow 'e is dyin'. I'm so 'fraid. 'Tis a doctor I wish to be goin' for but 'e lives a good ten miles away an' I cannot leave the good man for long.'

"Although I was not at all impressed with the crafty-looking old woman, I clambered into the carriage beside her. As we went along she kept up a babbling chatter which was very irritating. I was bored to death and anxious to get away, but I was bent on an errand of mercy and so I stifled my boredom.

"We rode into the hills through endless winding roads, and I wondered why the old dame had not gone at once for a doctor if she had been able to leave her 'good man' for such a long period. Then I reasoned that although we had seemed to be on the road for a great while we had perhaps ridden only a few miles, for our horse just sauntered along as though bound for no place at all. But at last we arrived at an immense house in the center of a wood. It was falling into ruin and appeared deserted. The porch sagged at a perilous angle. One end of the roof had caved in. Most of the windows were broken and the chimney was a wreck. Although the building had probably once been quite pretentious it was now ugly. The dull gray boards held not the slightest remainder of paint. Nor was the house the only thing of ruin, for the barn had utterly fallen in, a corn-crib near by was about to collapse and the fence in front of the house was down and half buried in the mud. The remains of an unkempt garden grew about the door, a few straggly bushes and a tangle of grapevines almost submerged in weeds.

"The old lady laboriously climbed down from the carriage, though not without a good deal of puffing and muttering of invectives which, though they were gibberish to me, created an unpleasant impression.

" ''Ere we are,' she muttered, 'an' it do be good to be back.'

"She led the way into the hall. It was even more dingy than the outside of the

house, a place of shadows. I could scarcely see my way about, but the old woman made no attempt to light a lamp. She seemed unaware of the gloom. She moved as sleekly as a cat, as though she could see clearly in the darkness. Upstairs she led the way, and as we ascended it appeared to grow even darker. I noticed that pieces of heavy brown paper had been nailed over the broken windows. We climbed another flight and now it was like night. I groped my way along, unable even to see the old woman. I just followed the direction of her voice, for she kept up a continuous stream of conversation.

" 'Jus' one more flight,' she mumbled. 'Ah, 'ere we are.'

"As she spoke she threw open the door of a room. The hinges creaked as loudly as though they had been unused for a century, but at least the room, despite its dimness, was somewhat lighter than the hall. It was of immense size, almost as large as a hotel lobby. It contained enough furniture to start a store. Evidently it was an attic storeroom, for the stuff was heaped up almost to the ceiling on every side. It was certainly a miserable room for a sick man to remain in.

"He lay upon a huge old-fashioned bed in a corner, moaning slightly. In a moment I was by his side. As I bent over him I received the shock of my life. I was gazing into the smiling face of Jolly Cauldron. Instantly I turned and rushed to the door. It was locked. But even as my hand closed upon the knob, Jolly Cauldron was upon me.

"He smiled like a wild thing as he sprang, and together we crashed to the floor. Meantime the old woman, her work accomplished, had disappeared. At that moment something seemed to treble my strength. I felt as though I were fighting for my very life. I crashed my fist into Jolly Cauldron's face. I rained blow after blow at his body, but though I struck with all my force he simply looked into my face and laughed.

" 'Keep it up, dog,' he sneered, 'and when you are tired, I'll beat you into submission.'

"His great arms closed about my body. I recalled how he had crushed Slim Williams. It was exactly as though I were held by a mighty octopus. The arms grew tighter. I was being crushed alive. I pleaded for mercy, I begged to be released. But still he laughed. Still that frightful force continued. Unconsciousness came at last and I grew limp in his arms.

"When I opened my eyes again I was aboard *The Poppy Pearl* and we were rapidly slipping out to sea. I sat with my head propped against the gunwale. It was a lovely day, with breeze enough to carry us along as smoothly and gracefully as though we were aboard a yacht. Near me stood Jolly Cauldron.

" 'It's rather good to have you back,' he chuckled."

As Guy paused for a moment in his narrative, Gloria placed her hand upon his arm.

"Please do not tell me any more," she said, and her voice was cold and lifeless.

Guy glanced up quickly. "What do you mean?" he cried.

"Merely that I do not believe your story," she answered calmly. "My lawyer has been working on this case for months with the aid of the best-rated detectives in town. We have learned that the schooner *Poppy Pearl* does not exist and never did exist. I do not know where you have been, nor do I care. I intend to get a divorce from you on the ground of consistent desertion. There are states where such a charge is permissible. I am sorry that this has happened. It has rather wrecked my faith in things."

THAT night Guy Sellers booked a room at the Logue Club. His head was in a whirl. The words of Gloria had stunned him. Her declaration that *The Poppy Pearl* did not exist and never had existed was amazing. He walked up and down the room as though he were in prison. He questioned his own sanity. All that had happened to him seemed wild now as he viewed each scene in retrospect. If the stories he had told were untrue, where had he been during all those months? Had he been a victim of amnesia? He decided against this theory because there had been no break in the continuity of his experiences; each had dovetailed perfectly into the others. His memory of everything that had happened on those voyages was utterly clear.

Hours passed. He took no thought of time. Piece by piece he tried to fit together that jigsaw puzzle. It was vital for him to prove that his story was not fictitious, to prove that he was not going mad. Unless he could find some trace of *The Poppy Pearl,* he believed that his mind, if not already deranged, might become so.

Finally he could bear the oppression of his room no longer. In desperation he went downstairs to the library. He wanted to escape from himself. Before the fireplace he found his greatest friend, John Steppling, who looked up lazily as Guy entered. In a few words Guy told him what had happened.

"And now," Guy finished, "I've lost Gloria. You can't appreciate how frightful are my feelings. I'm utterly wretched. Without her, life is useless."

Steppling said nothing. He let Guy talk, well knowing that the best way to suppress any emotion is to give in to it.

When Guy paused, he said calmly, "There never was a problem that couldn't be worked out. At the moment the main thing is for you to think clearly. Don't give way to nerves. Adopt a definite course of action. For example, you could trace your wanderings backward. Start at your arrival in New York."

"I came from Singapore on the steamship *Caliph* to San Francisco, thence by Santa Fe and Twentieth Century to New York. I worked my way from Singapore as one of the crew. When I arrived at San Francisco I wired my father and he sent me funds. His telegram is proof that I was in 'Frisco. The ship's records will prove that I came from Singapore. But past Singapore I cannot trace my wanderings, for it was there that I deserted *The Poppy Pearl.* I'm afraid that there is only one thing for me to do. I must find Jolly Cauldron."

DURING the following days he passed his entire time loitering about the waterfronts, frequenting the resorts of longshoremen, eating at cheap coffee-houses, and always he made it his business to get into conversation with the seafaring men, who usually were quite willing to talk. But ever the answer was the same.

"*The Poppy Pearl?* Never heard of her. Perhaps you've got the wrong name."

On one occasion he sat at a table in a café beside a rugged old man of the sea who looked as though he might have been Father Neptune in disguise.

"Never heard o' *The Poppy Pearl,*" he drawled, "but maybe I'd remember her cap'n. Know his name?

"Jolly Cauldron," replied Guy.

The old fellow chuckled softly to himself, and somehow Guy had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being held up to ridicule.

"Jolly Cauldron," explained the old man, "was a smuggler. He was lost at sea more than ten years ago. If you're lookin' for him you'd better sail for

Europe and then jump overboard when you're half-way across."

At this point another old mariner cut into the conversation.

"Murty," he said disdainfully, "your memory's clogged. There was a smuggler lost, but his name was Johnny Caldwell."

"You're wrong," snorted old Murty. "I never forget a thing. Got the best memory above decks. 'Twas Jolly Cauldron. I'd stake my last dollar on it."

Guy left the café in a daze. More and more he questioned his own sanity. After all, what is the dividing line between sanity and insanity? The wild line of the docks which he frequented like a grim specter did not serve to make reality any more clear-cut. He walked wearily up West Street. At that moment he was more confused than ever. If old Murty was right, how could he explain his uncanny adventures? Although it was broad daylight he seemed to be groping about in the dark, trying to find his way blindfolded. He had no idea how to continue his search. So he walked along, his hands in his pockets, his gaze upon the ground, when suddenly someone slapped him on the back.

"What's the matter, dog?" a voice cried; "are you looking for your bark?"

There could be no mistaking that voice, nor the infectious laugh that accompanied it. He glanced up eagerly into the face of Jolly Cauldron.

"Are you a ghost?" he murmured.

"Perhaps," was the reply. "If I were I'd be quite at home in New York, for is not this a city of shadows? However, I'm glad I met you, because we sail in half an hour. Even to a ghost, time is of value."

As Jolly Cauldron spoke he seized Guy's arm in his great steel fingers and hustled him along the waterfront to where *The Poppy Pearl* was berthed. Had he but known the truth he need not have been so imperative in his manner. There was nothing Guy wished for more than to sail again on that phantom ship; for so he was beginning to think of it.

When the tide turned, the schooner drifted out to sea. Guy stood in the stern and watched the city fade into a maze of humid mist. At that moment the city itself seemed wraith-like, the tops of the buildings melting into the clouds. Gradually, as the sails caught the wind, the schooner sped on and on, as though glad to be free, until the buildings seemed to verge into the mist, vanishing completely.

At last Guy had achieved his most ardent desire. He was back on *The Poppy Pearl,* and now as he trod the worm-eaten decks, the ship was far more real than the city which had just faded into the clouds.

There followed weeks of hard work, endless days of toil and nights in that insect-infested forecastle where the men cursed and sang ribald songs to pass the sluggish hours, nights when Guy believed the ship was in truth an eery thing of another world. He often sat by the hour on the steps leading to the deck, mulling over his problems. If these men were phantoms, then he was a phantom, too, for they ate the same food as he, slept in the same filthy quarters, worked on the same endless round of jobs. After all, what was reality? Were the people in New York and London real? Was anything real?

3

ONE night there was a frightful storm. Guy woke with a start from a troubled sleep, dimly conscious that some brooding peril hung over the ship. For a while he lay on his bunk trying to collect his wits. The hanging oil lamp sputtered dismally and swayed as though

it were on the verge of falling. He gazed intently into the appalling shadowy corners. He alone in the forecastle was awake. The others were too stupefied to be aroused by such mundane things as storms.

The wind shrieked as though all the discord of the universe had been released at once. It drowned out every natural sound, and yet almost like a dream-echo, above the chaos there came a cry, a human cry as though someone were being mangled by the fearful noise.

Guy sprang to his feet. In a moment he was on deck. By the feeble light which filtered up from the forecastle lamp, he beheld Jolly Cauldron choking little Wu, the Chinese cook. As his great fingers closed convulsively on the yellow scrawny throat, Jolly Cauldron was singing a frightful threnody of gloom.

"You see, Mr. Wu," he said, "at your funeral there is music, although I apologize for the absence of flowers. However, in a few moments you will be able to twine some flora of the sea into your queue; for I am going to show you the way to the gardens of the sea."

Perhaps it was the wildness of the night which made Guy Sellers cast all caution to the winds, but whatever the cause, he sprang at Jolly Cauldron with such force that by the impact Wu was released from the relentless grip. However, it was only for a moment that Guy had the upper hand. Against the power of Jolly Cauldron he was impotent. In less than a moment he was lying half dazed on the deck as a result of a ponderous blow on the mouth, completely subdued. Jolly Cauldron stood over him and grinned.

"Under the circumstances, dog," he said, "I guess I'd better put you back into your kennel."

While speaking he walked over and opened the forward hatch; then with supreme ease he lifted Guy up in his arms and flung him down into that yawning pit of blackness which was the hold.

For a long time Guy lay scarcely conscious. His head ached dully from the thud of his fall. His mind was confused. He could not remember things clearly. Where was it he had fallen from? And where was it he had fallen to? He was on the verge of delirium.

Then, without warning, there came a deafening crash, accompanied by a ripping, snapping pandemonium as though the old vessel were being torn to pieces by ruthless giants of the sea. Although Guy was lying flat on his back in the pitch-black hold, at the dreadful impact he rolled more than a dozen feet as if he had been a hogshead. The ship moaned and groaned in every beam. Huge rats ran over him in screeching hordes. They swept past him like armies plunging into battle; although that is not strictly true, for they were wild with terror, more like a vanquished army in ignominious flight. They paid no more attention to him than if he had been a block of wood as they scrambled screeching horribly over his body. He threw up his arm to keep their cold, dank feet from gouging out his eyes. He made no effort otherwise to escape them, for escape was impossible. With preterhuman instinct, the rats were fleeing from a doomed ship. The old vessel was grappling and groveling in the agony of death. "The Isle of Lost Ships" was ominously calling to her. Every board vibrated with the intensity of her motion; for a ship has a personality, a soul, as surely as a human being. And now she was dying, though not without a gallant fight against death.

Guy was fully conscious now. The shock had swung him back into complete rationality. His brain worked doubly fast, as though striving to make up for its pre-

vious sluggishness. By sheer force of will he kept himself from succumbing to panic. His only hope lay in clear thinking. He knew his position was grave. Evidently the ship had struck a half-submerged rock or a coral reef somewhere in the South Seas, the most treacherous and at the same time the most beautiful waters of the world. Where the vessel was foundering the water might be three feet deep or a mile. If a mile he would go down with the ship, be virtually buried alive, assuming that the hatch would hold water-tight. He thought of all the fantastic tales he had read of premature burial. Now he was living a story as terrifying as any by Edgar Allan Poe. There was no hope for him; he faced a lingering, suffocating death with perhaps complete madness before the ghastly end.

He pictured himself lying dead, with the few ravenous rats that had failed to get away gnawing at his flesh. Cold perspiration stood out on his forehead. He rose to his feet. The floor sloped at such a perilous angle he could scarcely stand. He groped his way along the walls. There was not a crevice anywhere through which even the faintest draft of air could filter.

Then unexpectedly there came a grating sound. The hatch was drawn back and Jolly Cauldron's voice bellowed out harshly above the wailing of the storm, "Here's a ladder, dog. Get out! You've got a chance to live if you can swim."

Guy Sellers fumbled about in the darkness until his hand came in contact with the rope ladder. He whined like a frightened animal as he seized it and began to ascend. He was saved, not from death definitely but at least from the frightfulness of a rat-infested tomb.

In a few moments he was on deck. It was still as black as the hold. The night was so thick that water and sky and air all merged into one limitless opaque mass of blackness. The rain drove down like chips of steel. In that gale no lantern could have survived. He seized a rope to keep himself from being swept overboard by the monstrous seas which constantly planed the deck. He did not know what had happened to his companions. They might have been standing beside him unnoticed in that impenetrable blackness. It was uncanny, the piercing, deafening crescendos of the elements, and yet not a single human sound.

How long he stood motionless, he did not know. It might have been hours or it might have been only minutes. In great moments, moments of awe or terror, time becomes abnormal. It grows to monstrous size or shrinks into insignificance. Time at best is absurdly indefinite.

Guy gasped for breath as a great wave crashed over him. He lost his grip on the rope ladder and was swept along, struggling futilely. He clutched frantically at the rail, but his fingers closed only on air. He tried to regain his feet, but the deck was so wet and slippery he fell before he had even risen to his knees. He cursed in despair. At that moment there came a wave so huge that as it broke above the ship it must have towered higher than the masts. It curled over and broke with a terrific roar. As it fell it seized Guy bodily and cast him into the whirling sea. Mercifully as the full force of the wave struck him he was stunned, and again his senses slipped from him like a cloak.

When he opened his eyes, he was lying on a white coral beach. It was morning. The storm had passed. The weather had swung to the other extreme, as is its habit in the tropics. In the dazzling brilliance the waters shone as though they had become a sea of liquid gold.

GUY sat up and gazed stupidly about him. There was not the slightest vestige of a human being anywhere in sight, nor any sign of habitation. About two hundred yards from the beach *The Poppy Pearl* clung perilously to a reef, her stern far out of the water, her bow almost submerged. During the night she had been badly buffeted and now she showed painfully the scars of her lost fight. All but one of the masts were gone, her stern was stove in, and, to judge from the position in which she lay, her rudder was lost. She appeared deserted, her ugly black hulk standing out like an obscene blot on the beauty of the morning.

Guy rose to his feet. He walked up the beach away from the water. There was a fringe of palm-grove which he decided he would explore. It was carpeted with fallen coconuts which had been blown to the ground by the storm. With the side of a jagged rock he tore away the husks and broke one open. The milk was deliciously sweet.

"To be shipwrecked on such an island," he reflected, "is certainly not a hardship. I have tumbled into Eden. If it weren't for Gloria I wouldn't mind spending a year here."

In the grove behind him he heard a great commotion as though some animal were approaching. The next moment Jolly Cauldron appeared from among the trees. He was grinning broadly.

Guy was both surprized and glad to see him. "Where did you come from?" he gasped.

Jolly Cauldron waved his hand vaguely toward the jungle of palms. "Over yonder," he said. "I'm not very familiar with the neighborhood because I only moved in yesterday. But from a casual survey of the surroundings I think I'm going to like it."

"I can't understand how you happened to be among those trees," declared Guy. "It is remarkable."

"Not at all," was the reply. "When I was washed overboard I merely swam to shore. There was nothing extraordinary in my accomplishment. It was not necessary to swim any great distance, and besides, the waves helped me. They washed me in, just as you were carried by them up on the beach like a dead fish. For a few moments after I found you I tried to awaken you from the stupor into which you had fallen, but without success. You refused to be aroused. So I thought I'd saunter about the island for a while and get a line on our chances of finding happiness."

"Have you any idea where we are?" asked Guy.

"I believe on a coral island, although those distant mountain peaks suggest a volcanic origin. How far we are from the next link in the chain I do not know. We may have to stay here a year, and then again we may be able to leave before sunset. Personally I lean toward the year. Fortunately *The Poppy Pearl* is lying in shallow water. With care we can wade out to her along the coral reefs without getting into water much above our waists. But we've got to be careful to stick to the reefs, because if we don't we'll be in water so deep only sharks will ever find us. Even on the reefs great care must be taken. If we cut our feet we're liable to develop sores that'll never heal, stay open festering for years. Coral is like women, sometimes very beautiful, at other times very dangerous. When we get out to the ship it'll be a very easy matter to rig up a line and tackle. On second thought, I'll go out to the ship alone. I'm more familiar with the line of work. You can remain on shore and unload the tackle. It will be a simple matter to transfer enough food and supplies to last until this island is in a flourishing state. By

the way, dog, shall we bring some vermin off the ship also, so we'll feel at home?"

NEVER in his life had Guy attempted such arduous tasks, not even on board *The Poppy Pearl,* as crowded the next few weeks. They worked from dawn till dark transferring supplies from the ship. They took everything that could possibly be of use to them, provisions, clothes, tools, ropes, sails and even stray bits of the wreckage. Jolly Cauldron was tireless. He worked as hard as he had ever driven his men. His faults were legion, but laziness was not among them.

When all the cargo from the ship had been piled up on the beach, well out of reach of the surf, they set about erecting huts out of the stray bits of wood and pieces of mast. They thatched the roof with palm leaves, held in place by strong ropes and covered with tarpaulin. Jolly Cauldron, after years at sea, was an expert carpenter, and it was he who did the planning.

As time wore on, Guy had an excellent opportunity to study Jolly Cauldron. Guy had long since given up the idea that he was a phantom. He was as real as anybody, more real than most people, for he had individuality. A great many people are merely copies of somebody else.

Jolly Cauldron scoffed at everything, even though he was surprizingly well educated. Guy was a college graduate, and yet Jolly Cauldron's knowledge on many subjects far eclipsed his.

Once he said to Guy, "I can speak seven languages and it doesn't appear as though on this island I'm going to need more than one. What a dreadful waste of knowledge!"

For the first few days of their exile he was in a rare mood. Among other things, he showed Guy the log of the vessel.

"I prize this highly," he said, "because I want to take it to Liverpool to support my insurance claim."

As Jolly Cauldron spoke, Guy glanced at the name on the log-book, "The Golden Glow."

Jolly Cauldron noticed his surprized expression.

"*The Poppy Pearl,*" he exclaimed, "is registered in Liverpool as *The Golden Glow.* She merely goes by the name of *The Poppy Pearl* when we are smuggling opium because she comes of excellent family and her folks would feel very bad if she went astray. I think you will admit that it was a wise precaution for me to keep changing her name at my convenience. Sometimes she was *The Poppy Pearl,* sometimes *The Golden Glow.* I always carried two log-books with me and an extra forged set of ship's papers. Am I not somewhat of a genius? You see, dog, you're learning something from me every day."

He paused for a moment, then continued musingly, "She was a beastly ship. I always wanted to wreck her but couldn't. When I abandoned my efforts, nature took them up. Now she lies on the reefs, her back broken, a total loss; or rather a total gain, for I had her over-insured and my profit will be enormous. Glance at her, dog, and let your poetic spirit have free sway. Can you not write a sonnet about her, a great black pearl strung on a necklace of coral?"

Of all the crew of *The Poppy Pearl,* only Guy and Jolly Cauldron had safely reached the island. Many of them had been swept overboard during the gale, while those who had been down in the forecastle, steeped in opium, had been drowned like rats as they dreamed of Manchu princesses; for the forecastle had dipped under water and when Jolly Cauldron fought his way into it while securing the supplies, even he had sprung back in horror at the ghastliness of the

sight. Now that the vessel was firm on the reef the water had seeped out again, leaving the dead men covered with bits of seaweed and sea-flora. They lay on their bunks, their putty-white faces grinning like fiends. Grimly, one by one, he carried them up to the deck and cast them into the sea. The sharks circled about the vessel in schools. They must have thought that it was feast-day.

4

HAD it not been for one rift in the lute, life on that island would have been one roundelay of enchantment. The rift was the utter monotony of existence. It was like gazing for ever at the same perfect picture. A sea of azure blue, a sky of ever-changing, ever-charming glory, palms that stood out against the distant hills as clear-cut as cameos. But over all hung a web of silence that was maddening. On the island there was not a living animal; at least none had ever come within the range of their vision save a few giant crabs that haunted the groves like ghouls. But they were not like living things.

Sometimes Jolly Cauldron sat late into the night talking on desultory subjects. More often he lay on the beach and smoked a small black pipe.

"With this pipe," he cried, "I can find all the friends man could desire in the space of a few brief moments. Why do you not join me and we can journey into Elysian Fields together? In time, monotony, especially in the tropics, will sap the vitality of any man. Knowing this, I am making every effort to guard against it. We may be on this island the rest of our lives. You are young. You may live forty years. Can you imagine forty years of unescapable monotony?"

Guy made no reply. He refused to heed the advice of Jolly Cauldron. In its very logic it was sinister. Night after night he sat alone, gazing wistfully out over the sea. In the moonlight the coral-sand glowed whiter than ever. Sometimes he strolled along the beach in an endeavor to break the awful monotony of never-ending hours, but he could find no solace. Even his footfalls were soundless.

By day also the monotony was maddening. On the island there was not even a single bird; at least, neither Guy nor Jolly Cauldron had ever seen one. Jolly Cauldron cared not at all, but Guy was a high-strung individual. The continued calm of the island made him melancholy. At last he gave up his walks in the moonlight. He merely crouched on the beach like a thing of stone. He grew haggard, and his face became the color of old ivory.

One morning he rose at dawn and walked slowly along the shore, as though impelled in his course by some strong hidden force. His body seemed without weight. His feet lifted from the ground without effort. When he talked, no sound came from his lips. He was untrammeled. He was free. He capered along the beach like a merry elf, laughing and jabbering incoherently. During the night he had developed a bit of fever and was slightly delirious.

Eventually he forsook the beach for the coconut groves. He made his way clear back to the hills which neither he nor Jolly Cauldron had ever attempted to explore. Hours passed, but to him they were insignificant. Like gravity, time also had lost its importance. Now in the hills other trees besides the palms commenced to appear, trees of luxurious foliage, trees of tropical splendor. Impulse drove him forward. He made no effort to overcome it. The only thing that mattered was that he was free, not held in check by anything.

Suddenly he paused. He had come to a waterfall, a delightful little cascade

which dripped merrily over the rocks and ended in a pool of limpid water as cool as evening dew about twenty feet below where he was standing. But it was not the waterfall that made him pause, but a human laugh, the laugh of a girl as seductive and sweet as the nectar of poppies. Cautiously he leaned over the edge of the gray rocks and gazed down into the pool below, and there he saw a sight that repaid him in full for all the monotonous hours which he had passed on the island.

In the pool a young girl as gorgeous as any princess of the *Arabian Nights* sported merrily. She laughed and sang snatches of wild, weird love-songs. He knew that they were love-songs, even though he could not understand the words. She dived and swam as though she had been born in the water, as though she were a mermaid. The sunlight glistened on her golden-bronze body. She seemed to cast off an ethereal light, to out-rival the sun in splendor. Her young firm body was strong and slender. Her hair fell in wild confusion about her shoulders in an alluring blue-black maze of glory, a color which one seldom sees save in the most exotic paintings. Her intensely dark eyes seemed to glow with a suggestion of the hidden passion within her. Her teeth were pearls set in a mouth so tantalizingly red, so utterly voluptuous, that even the charm of the Sirens could not have been more seductive.

Guy lay there gazing at her until finally she emerged from her bath and gracefully dressed in a single garment, a silken, cloud-like thing that served to make the glory of her more pronounced. Then she disappeared among the trees.

For a long time he lay staring after her as though he expected her to return. As the moments passed and she did not come, he reluctantly rose to his feet and set off on his lonely journey back to camp. Now the fever had abated. His feet seemed made of lead. He was very tired.

When he reached their huts, he found Jolly Cauldron in an exceptionally bad humor.

"If you're going to stray off like this," he growled, "without permission, I'll have to tie you up again. I thought you were trained."

"I've had a singular adventure," said Guy, "but I refuse to tell you of it until you adopt a more civil tone."

"Amusing," jeered Jolly Cauldron, "a worthless mongrel aping a thoroughbred. However I'll change my manner. Are you hungry? I've made a fine kettle of stew for you. You see I love you as though you were my son. I try to gratify your every wish. There is also a pot of coffee boiling over the fire. Do I not deserve a little consideration for such thoughtfulness?"

After Guy had eaten and rested somewhat, he began to narrate his adventures. But in the middle of his story Jolly Cauldron interrupted him.

"Why do you tell me your dreams?" he asked sarcastically. "Last night I dreamed I was a moonbeam sitting on a cloud. It was a unique experience, but I'm not going to bore you by repeating it. You're getting to be too credulous. You are taking hallucinations seriously."

"Laugh if you wish," snapped Guy, "but I swear that I saw a lovely maiden bathing in a natural pool of water, a maiden of such peerless beauty that even you would bow down and worship before her."

"At least you are growing interesting," drawled Jolly Cauldron. "I like enthusiasm. But you are rather exaggerating when you suggest that I would bow down before any woman. I wouldn't. Do you

know why? Because you can't trust any of them."

"Nevertheless the presence of that girl proves beyond a doubt that we are not far from civilization. If she is here, there must be others. There must be houses. If we can find where she dwells we may be able to get away from this island."

"I'm not hankering to get back to civilization," said Jolly Cauldron. "This is a bit of paradise. I can see no reason for leaving. We are leading a peaceful calm existence except when you go frisking off in the hills chasing phantoms. The air is restful. Life is sweet. I have been used to the hardships of the sea for years; now solitude rather appeals to me. Tell me, dog, have you ever seen such sunrises and sunsets? If you go back, what are you going back to? Can you find a beach more alluring than this, or water that laves the body more agreeably? I'm disgusted with you. All this beauty and still not satisfied."

Guy made no reply. He sat gazing moodily into the fire. At last he could restrain himself no longer.

"If it suits you," he said, "it suits me, but it is rather a pity that you could not see the gorgeous girl of the pool. As she stood on the brink about to dive, her yellow-bronze body shone in the sun as though she were a statue. Her expression was languorous. Her eyebrows were thin as though drawn by a single stroke of a kohl pencil. Her long silken lashes were canopies to eyes that no man could withstand. They seemed to have some hidden mystery lurking in their depths. Her forehead was as smooth as polished ivory. Her mouth was as red as a crushed cherry. But beautiful as was her face, the glory of her body rivaled it in magnificence. Here was a girl for whom all the kingdoms of the world might totter. Her bosom was firm and graceful. Were I an Arab I might compare her breasts to twin oranges. Her waist was very small, yet not slender enough to spoil the perfect contour of her figure. Her hands were tapering and rather fragile, the most expressive hands man ever gazed upon."

Guy paused for a moment; then he said tensely, "What would you give to behold such a girl, a girl possessed of all the animal passions of a wild thing of the forest, a girl who blends with sunsets and soft warm music; who looks like a goddess dancing by the black pool?"

Guy laughed loud and gratingly as he spoke. His voice carried a note of sarcasm that was maddening. With an oath Jolly Cauldron sprang to his feet. He seized Guy by the throat. His great fingers closed so tightly that Guy could not breathe.

"You'll find that girl for me," he cried hoarsely. "You'll take me to her or else I'll drown you in the cool water that has given you so much enjoyment."

At the last word he flung Guy from him. He stood raging like a wild bull. His hands clutched convulsively at the air as though they were still hungry for something to strangle.

Guy lay where he had fallen, fighting to get back his breath. He writhed in agony. His face was blue. His ears seemed like percussion caps that were in danger of exploding. His heart tore at his chest as though it were a spirit in prison struggling to get free. He was thoroughly beaten, yet Jolly Cauldron had not struck him once, merely squeezed his throat, throwing his world into chaos. The minutes dragged like years. Finally he ceased to struggle. Life wasn't worth fighting for. At best it was a hopeless battle. He closed his eyes. Death stared him in the face and he was glad. He welcomed oblivion so that he might for ever get away from Jolly Cauldron. And so he lay passive on the beach, and as ever when man ceases to cope with con-

ditions, nature takes up the battle for him. Gradually the tumult in his ears subsided. His mind cleared. His heart ceased to clamor for release. His breathing became less painful. With closed eyes he cared not what passed over him.

Jolly Cauldron took a flask of whisky from his pocket.

"Here, dog," he said in a conciliatory voice; "drink this, it will revive you. We're going on a long journey tomorrow. We're going to explore the hills of dream in quest of the golden girl."

5

JOLLY CAULDRON was a creature of impulse. He no sooner thought of a thing than he attempted it. His personality had not been spoiled by youthful inhibitions and suppressions. He seldom made elaborate plans in advance. It was his custom to work out details as he went along. When he had kidnapped Guy in Stanbury Downs with the help of an old woman whose penury had hardened her conscience, and a half-ruined house that was tenantless, the affair had been the result of a momentary impulse. He had seen Gloria and Guy at a shop in London and had followed them at a discreet distance until he found out the address of the house where they were stopping in Stanbury Downs. This had been quite simple, for they had ordered several books to be mailed to them by a garrulous bookseller. From him Jolly Cauldron had drawn the information he desired.

At sunrise the next morning Jolly Cauldron again gave way to an impulse. Accompanied by Guy he set out in quest of a girl whom he had decided he desired, despite the fact that he had never even gazed upon her face. With him desire was akin to love. He pushed forward at a terrific pace as though he were incapable of fatigue.

Guy smiled to himself as he reflected that this was not incongruous, for most of the time he was like a thing of steel. To him it meant nothing to be tired. Guy had never seen him when he seemed in need of rest. True, in the evenings he had lain on the beach smoking, but it was not as though he did it through physical weariness. Rather he seemed to rest merely for the pleasure of enjoying the fantastic dreams which his inhalations evoked.

Toward noon the breeze died down entirely and the air grew as hot as if the sand beneath their feet were a furnace floor. The sun seemed suspended in the sky, a chandelier of scorching, searing fire. Guy walked along in a daze. The heat waves rose from the ground visibly. Guy wished to stop and rest, but Jolly Cauldron snarled at him.

"We'll not stop," he cried hoarsely, "not till we reach the black pool. Then you can drink till your liver floats away. What would be the sense of stopping here? You couldn't find water."

Guy closed his eyes to keep out the glaring light and plodded aimlessly along. He followed Jolly Cauldron like a whipped dog. When he felt as though he could endure the torture no longer, they came upon a spring. He babbled foolishly as he beheld it. Without pausing to drink of the water, he plunged right in, head and all. Even the pores of his skin drank. They absorbed the water like sponges.

As they continued their march, the heat seemed to relent. A gentle breeze sprang up. Peace returned to them. After that first spring they passed many others. Now that they were no longer thirsty, water was ever within reach of their hands. Eventually they arrived at the black pool in which Guy had beheld the lovely maiden bathing. Jolly Cauldron was impressed and pleased.

"You've proved that much of your story at least," he said. "Now can you remember which direction the girl went after leaving the pool?"

"She disappeared up the little winding path that runs directly under the falls," replied Guy. "Every detail is graven on my memory as though cut there with a chisel. I could not forget her if I wished. It is like a splendid scar that always will remain. Thus was the effect of the golden girl upon me."

Jolly Cauldron was not pleased at Guy's enthusiasm. He sniffed contemptuously but he did not voice his displeasure as he made his way to the tiny path Guy had indicated. He strode along as grim and glum as the most joyless of the old Stoic philosophers.

THEY had not continued far before they came to a clearing, a palm grove of surprizing loveliness. In the center of the grove stood a one-storied house, roughly built with a palm-thatched roof. It was of immense size and there were several outhouses standing near by almost equally as large. On the veranda of the house sat a man as repugnant as Jolly Cauldron. At their approach he looked up lazily. He had evidently been basking in the sun like a big beetle. He laughed shortly as they approached.

"Are you apparitions?" he drawled. "Or do you possess warm blood? At first glance you might be taken for monsters. At second glance you wouldn't be taken at all, not for anything."

He laughed gratingly at his own feeble effort at humor.

It was thus that Jolly Cauldron and Guy Sellers first met Fernay Corday, whose chief distinction in life was that he was the father of Kum-Kum, the golden girl.

Fernay Corday was a veritable gargoyle of a man, a monstrous gargoyle, and yet his ponderous size, far from being a mark of strength, gave the impression of extreme weakness. It suggested an enormous over-inflated balloon filled with noxious gases, likely to collapse at any moment, or a body washed up by the sea. His face was mottled, as blotchy as a piebald cow. There was no underglow of health shining through the skin. His eyes were dull, his nose bulbous and purple. His lower lip sagged as though the muscles had slipped and it was falling away from the decayed stumps of teeth.

Once a prosperous trader, he had succumbed to the witchery of languorous South Sea days. Now he dealt solely in copra, and from that alone he was able to reap far more than sufficient for his immediate requirements. He owned several coral islands outright and had contracts for the entire copra output of several others. Had he cared to exert himself he might have been one of the wealthiest men of the islands, for he was a keen trader and the natives liked him because he had almost become one of them.

Years before, he had married a Marquesan princess whose blood was half French and half Marquesan. Of this union Kum-Kum was born, Kum-Kum the little golden pagan, famed from Apia to Papeete. Fernay Corday himself was of mongrel extraction. He was descended from a long line of restless wanderers who had sailed the seven seas and intermarried so often that traces of any one particular race were obliterated. Therefore it was natural for him to be a rover. It was in the blood. Natural also was it for him to drift to Polynesia.

On land he had ever been a spendthrift, a waster, who squandered every cent he could earn. At sea he was forced to save, forced to accumulate a bit of money even against his will. However, he chafed under the constant restraint of

a sailor's life. It held him down too utterly to one particular thing.

When on a certain voyage he landed in Tahiti, he decided at once that he had found at last the land in which he would settle. At the time he had had quite a bit of money as wealth is measured in the South Seas; so he bought an interest in a sailing-vessel which plied in and out among the islands. In this venture he prospered. He made more money than he could squander. At first he dealt in all commodities. Later he switched to copra alone. He never tried to branch out, to develop a larger business. He was satisfied with what he already had. An indolent life appealed to him.

In the end he abandoned the sea and settled on the island where Guy and Jolly Cauldron had found him. Now he had attained his heart's desire. His days were passed slothfully in a hammock on the screened porch of his one-storied house. His nights were passed in wild carousing, drunken nights and mysticism.

He lived with Kum-Kum and a score of Marquesan servants, not to mention two Chinese cooks who were veritable conjurers at their calling, for they could cook the most savory dishes from the most ordinary ingredients. They knew how to make the native kava, coconut brandy. It was this accomplishment that endeared them to Fernay Corday.

Fetia, Kum-Kum's mother, was dead. She had died of old age at thirty-eight. Like Kum-Kum she had been beautiful in her youth, but her blooming was forced like that of a hot-house flower. She lived intensely, loving pleasure, sleeping by day, feasting by night, a gorgeous flame consuming itself in its own glowing. Even when death was upon her she was not sorry for the manner in which her time had been passed.

"At least," she said, "I have lived, and that is much. Now I die. It is inevitable. There is nothing sad about it. One need only grieve over the death of a person who dies before he has lived."

So passed Fetia, mother of Kum-Kum.

FERNAY CORDAY graciously welcomed Guy and Jolly Cauldron into his home. "I have enough rooms," he said, "to accommodate a regiment. But they are never used. This island is rather off the beaten track. Therefore it gives me great pleasure to welcome you. Enter my home and remain as long as you desire."

It was not until late in the evening that Kum-Kum appeared. Then when the dark shadows of night had settled down over the island and the dim oil lamps were lighted, she came softly to them, as though she had stepped out of the shadows through opaque curtains. Fernay Corday had ordered his Marquesan boys to play. There were three of them and they sat on the coral sand not far from the veranda steps, playing sad dreamy music. Then came Kum-Kum.

She whirled into the dim-lit circle, her strong white teeth glowing through her opened lips, as though lighted by the flame within her. In her hair were entwined a few hibiscus blossoms and about her neck was a string of pink coral beads. She was dressed in a single garment which accentuated the soft lines of her body.

The effect of her appearance upon the three men was peculiar. Fernay Corday gazed at her through half-closed eyes. He was amused. She was a pretty picture to gaze upon as he sipped his kava. Perhaps he thought of Fetia in the heyday of her youth. He was on the verge of sleep.

Crouched in the sand like a great ape was Jolly Cauldron. He had left his place on the veranda as soon as she had come to them. Even in his wildest fancies he had never imagined that she would be

quite as lovely as this. His eyes were as bright as the eyes of one who has not learned to reason. He sat there immobile. His breath came audibly from his lips as though some great internal commotion were going on within him. His temples throbbed, the muscles of his mouth grew set as he gazed upon that gorgeous little pagan.

Guy had followed Jolly Cauldron. He, too, crouched in the sand, but the emotion within him differed from that which swept Jolly Cauldron. To Guy it seemed as though he were living the supreme artistic moment of his life. The dancing of Kum-Kum was like rhythmic poetry. Each wave of her hand was a quatrain, the lithesome swaying of her body a roundelay and the gentle rise and fall of her golden breasts were lyrics of enticement. After all, poetry need not be rendered in words. It is simply a mood, a series of harmonies, cadences, or a blending of soft-toned colors.

Even the peculiar attributes of the night served to act as a wild, weird frame to that brilliant picture. Above the palms, the sky was as black as the earth before day was created. The air was lifeless-still. Not a leaf stirred, not a flower trembled. All nature had paused to watch the charming spell of Kum-Kum, who danced with the abandon of one who lived each moment to the full. Her body swayed and undulated. When she gazed at Jolly Cauldron she smiled as though she were making sport of him. She seemed to lead him on for the sheer pleasure of ultimately repulsing him. But still he did not move; still he crouched ape-like in the sand.

Then came the storm. The thunder ripped the heavens in two and the rain poured down in sheets of chilling coldness. A sharp wind rose from nowhere and played havoc with the veranda lights. In a few moments the full fury of the storm struck and the lights went out. Reluctantly he rose to his feet and entered the house. He went at once to the room assigned to him. He wanted to be alone. He did not wish to talk.

The storm increased in violence. Its ferocity appalled him. He walked over to the open window. The rain crashed in in shrieking floods, but he did not care. Its coolness was like balm upon his forehead. It soothed his nerves. His fears vanished. Once more he was in tune with the witchery of the night. The air was charged with poetry, with charm, with haunting fragrant melodies.

Night and the down by the sea,
And the veil of the rain on the down:
And she came through the mist and the rain to me
From the safe, warm lights of the town.

The verses of Symons' poem kept running through the current of his thoughts. Even as they did so there came a blinding flash of lightning and by its illumination he beheld Kum-Kum, a thing of golden glory, dancing in the rain. She had thrown aside her single garment and now she danced with more utter abandon than ever. She might have been a pagan fire-worshipper dancing a religious epic to the storm.

Entranced, Guy waited for the next flash of lightning. When it came, so vivid it was, it seemed as if day had prematurely broken. Kum-Kum's dripping golden body glowed as though it were new-cast metal, still burning hot. But now she had paused in her dancing, for Jolly Cauldron stood over her. He had seized her in his arms and his lips were pressed to hers. Then the lightning died. The curtains of night swept down again.

Guy uttered an oath. For a moment only he hesitated, then he sprang through the window.

Blindly he plunged toward the spot where he had beheld Kum-Kum dancing. The last vestige of civilization had

slipped from him. He was consumed with hatred. The night was so thick he felt as though he could grasp its texture in his hands and rend it like tapestry. The rain drove down in a pitiless deluge. The wind howled mockingly, and the trees moaned in their distress. Again the lightning flashed. He gazed quickly about. The palm-grove was deserted. Only the fury of the storm remained.

6

MORNING dawned at last, calm and beautiful. The storms, the passions of the night were past. Jolly Cauldron at breakfast was as serene as a June day. Never had he been in a more amiable mood. His good-humor was infectious and Fernay Corday responded to it. But Guy did not. He sat gazing moodily at his plate, as gloomy as a London fog.

Kum-Kum that morning was rather wistful and demure. Now the fire in her eyes was dimmed. She flamed brightest after sunset. Guy was surprized and not a little annoyed to learn that Kum-Kum knew not a word of English. She spoke French entirely, of which he was totally ignorant.

Jolly Cauldron leaned across the table and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I know seven languages," he grinned, "foremost of which is French. Now am I repaid a hundredfold for the barren years of study."

Those days were days of jealousy and insane passion. Guy and Jolly Cauldron watched each other furtively. Jolly Cauldron was untterly enamored of Kum-Kum. He was insane about her. He who had always scoffed at religion now openly worshipped that pagan girl. The Beast was in love with Beauty. Guy elected himself a guardian, a protector to watch over Kum-Kum to see that no harm came to her from her semi-mad wooer. He, too, was fascinated by her. Many times he cursed that he knew no French and could not understand a word she uttered. Often he asked Jolly Cauldron what she had said, but only to be answered by glib lies.

"She says she's very fond of dogs but she doesn't care for them unless they are of noble pedigree. So I told her you had a violent temper, to beware of you because you were descended from all the dogs of war."

At times Guy walked alone down to the beach. He wanted to think calmly. Neither he nor Jolly Cauldron was making the slightest effort to leave the island, despite the fact that the next island was less than five miles away, where they could obtain passage to Papeete on one of the small trading-ships that continually plied in and out through the archipelago. He threw himself on the beach and gazed out to sea. Escape seemed distant. Jolly Cauldron would not leave the island and Guy was unwilling to desert Kum-Kum. He was not in love with her; he simply wished to watch over her. At that moment the island seemed the most beautiful spot in the world.

When Guy thought of Gloria his conscience bothered him. He was virtually deserting her, for he was no longer forced to remain on the island. And yet were he to leave, harm might befall Kum-Kum. He was torn between two duties, and as usual he chose the easiest, the one nearest at hand. In his decision he found no peace. It made him more reckless than ever.

One morning Jolly Cauldron made a daring proposition to Fernay Corday, taking the precaution to see that the trader was half drunk before doing so.

"Bestow the hand of Kum-Kum on me in marriage," he said bluntly, "and I will make you a present of ten gallons of the finest Scotch whisky."

Guy was speechless at the bold suggestion. He expected Fernay Corday to rise in his wrath and slay his loathsome guest on the spot, but the effect of the words was far different from his anticipation. Fernay Corday straightened up in his chair and blinked his eyes several times, as though by so doing he could sober somewhat. Finally he spoke.

"Did you say gallons or quarts?" he asked.

"I said gallons," responded Jolly Cauldron. "You see there is nothing close about me. When I purchase jewels I am quite agreeable to offer a fortune in exchange."

Fernay Corday hesitated for a moment only, then he said craftily, "Make it twelve gallons."

Jolly Cauldron laughed shortly. "Twelve it is, then," he agreed.

In this simple fashion was the sale of Kum-Kum consummated. Jolly Cauldron intended to marry her legally, it is true, but nevertheless the affair was one of the most despicable barter. To pass judgment on the action of Fernay Corday one would have to be intimately acquainted with South Sea standards. There the art of love is looked upon as being as natural as a Gauguin painting. Gauguin himself was rather promiscuous in his wooings. The average Marquesan is an ephemeral lover. His amours are seldom lasting. When a couple have married and later parted it is looked upon philosophically. There is little weeping. Sorrows seldom last throughout a day. Morality is measured by an extremely flexible standard.

Although Fernay Corday was guilty of a questionable act in selling Kum-Kum, there is one thing to be said in his favor. He had a genuine liking for Jolly Cauldron. He considered him an excellent mate for Kum-Kum. According to his views, as a lover Jolly Cauldron left nothing to be desired. He was pleased with the outcome of their meeting. When he thought of the twelve gallons of good Scotch he was doubly pleased.

THAT night Guy went to his room immediately after dinner. He wished to be alone. His mind was a surging, restless flood. The thought of Jolly Cauldron possessing Kum-Kum nauseated him. All the primitive passions of earth were gripping his soul. If only Kum-Kum had understood English he could have discussed the matter with her. One thing was certain. She must escape from such slavery, even though it was called marriage.

He paced up and down the room as he always did when he was greatly distressed. He felt as though his brain were afire, as though his mind were consumed by the heat of his fury. In the end he decided that he would steal Kum-Kum. Jolly Cauldron had purchased Kum-Kum from Fernay Corday. Now he would steal her from Jolly Cauldron. He decided that he would make off with her in the dead of the night. They would leave the island in one of her father's canoes.

As a solution loomed up before him, his anger abated somewhat. He walked to the open window. The breeze struck warmly, drowsily against his face. A yellow-golden moon hung low in the sky like an enormous Chinese lantern. Its soft-toned radiance quite dwarfed the few lamps which hung from spikes driven into the palms. Soft music, haunting, wistful, sad, floated upon the air.

Fernay Corday reclined at full length in a hammock. His hands hung listlessly over the sides as though he were stupefied with kava. He was a great misshapen shadow rendering discordant the sweet notes of the music. As usual Jolly Cauldron crouched ape-like in the sand, as immobile as a carved Buddha. And Kum-Kum danced. Her slim loveliness wove a

spell over Guy Sellers. Even at that distance he was fascinated. The moon seemed to glow more brightly that it might bathe her gorgeous body in its soft yellow light. Yellow moon, yellow moon and lanterns glowing in the trees. Her body shimmered like gold, her teeth gleamed white, her eyes shone with the light of diamond fires. His head whirled.

As he gazed at Kum-Kum a hundred disjointed impressions swept through his thoughts. She reminded him of flowers waving in the sun, of sea-foam breaking on a coral beach, of stars and poetry and soft radiance, of Shahrazad and the gorgeous slaves she told about, of wild oranges laved by mountain-dew, of yellow sapphires and opals blazing in the desert glare—strange, wild, discordant tapestry of dreams.

In the hush of the night, long after the lantern-moon had set, he went to her. The air was still, yet there seemed to be a suggestion of music lingering in the silence, as though nature had been singing and had paused on a beautiful note until the last reverberating echo had faded.

Kum-Kum's room was in the far end of the house, and as Guy stealthily crept forward the distance seemed unending. There was an antique lantern burning in the center of the hall, and it emphasized the distant shadows. His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer and he was surprized that the noise of it did not awaken everyone. Finally he arrived at Kum-Kum's door. He hesitated before pushing it open. His courage failed him, but his misgivings were fleeting. The next moment he opened the door and silently entered the room. Even a cat could not have glided more softly.

Before the vision of Kum-Kum he stopped. She was lying asleep on a low bed near the open window. Her blue-black hair fell about her shoulders untrammeled by comb or hair-pins. Her lips were smiling as though her dreams were pleasant. Over her slender form a coverlet was drawn, a coverlet of sheerest fabric. Beside her burned a copper bowl of fragrant incense. It cast off an eery blue glow. As the light fell on her pungent yellow skin, it made a green goddess of her.

Softly Guy placed his arms about her. The coverlet slipped away, revealing her lovely body dressed in a garment of tapa cloth as soft as rose-petals. As her warm body touched his, he trembled. From her hair an elusive perfume floated. At that moment everything on earth was forgotten. Only Kum-Kum mattered, Kum-Kum the pagan, the exotic, the daring, vivid, glowing girl of gold.

Back through the halls he went. He felt no fear. He was not nervous. He cared naught for Fernay Corday, nor even for the wrath of Jolly Cauldron. The strength of her attraction had made him as strong as Jason.

Kum-Kum did not awaken. He carried her as tenderly as though she had been a fragile orchid, an orchid of priceless worth. All the beauty of the *Arabian Nights* seemed dimmed by the glory of her. He longed to kiss her, to feel her soft warm lips against his. But he refrained because he was afraid, afraid of what might happen afterward. To kiss those lush red lips would have been as dangerous as plunging into the Maelstrom. Even the thought of her kisses made his head swim. And Jolly Cauldron had bought her. The thought made him shudder. And he pressed the lovely Kum-Kum a little closer to him. As he emerged from the house into the open air, a soft flower-sweetened breeze cooled his burning brow.

It was very dark in the coconut grove. The moon had set and the lamps that had hung to the tree-spikes had been re-

moved. Overhead the stars glowed and glimmered in startling brilliance. The sky was so intensely clear it seemed as though it were a great inverted bowl. As he strode forward with his precious burden, he could scarcely see a yard before him. The fronds of the coconut palms far above stood out clearly in silhouette against an azure sky. Far in the distance the hill-tops loomed up grimly, half concealed in shadows. He walked slowly and cautiously by, but even so he collided with tree-trunks in the frond-shaded grove. The sea was not far away, where the outrigger canoes lay hidden, but he decided not to attempt to reach it in the darkness. He wished to keep Kum-Kum from danger. To continue onward would have been extremely perilous.

Very carefully he deposited her lovely form upon the sand. Although she sighed softly, she did not awaken. A thousand strange fancies flitted through his mind as he sat beside her. He thought of Gloria in New York, thousands of miles away. He wondered if she had kept her promise and divorced him. The reflection did not make him happy. Then he glanced toward Kum-Kum. In spite of himself he smiled. He was a bit like a modern Bluebeard. He already had one wife and now he was stealing a pagan girl. Where he was fleeing, he had not stopped to consider. He was bound for Hikuera. Beyond that he had never given a thought. Could he leave Kum-Kum there, abandon her after setting her free? If he did, Jolly Cauldron would eventually locate her and carry her back to the island. If he took Kum-Kum with him, away from the South Seas, there would be numerous difficulties when he got back to so-called civilized countries. He would be traveling with a lovely maiden who was unchaperoned and who was not his wife, not to mention the fact that he could not understand a word that maiden uttered. If he went back to New York with Kum-Kum, what explanation could he give Gloria?

At dawn Kum-Kum awoke. She sat up and gazed about her. Surprize, even dismay, was written on her face. She could not understand how she happened to be lying hidden in the jungle growth. Guy could not explain, for he spoke no French.

Kum-Kum rose to her feet and began walking back toward the house. Guy was amazed. Even though she knew no English it should have been apparent to her that this was her supreme opportunity to get free. It took him but a minute to overtake her. He seized her by the arm. As he did so she turned upon him like a cornered animal. This rather complicated things. And time was precious. There was only one thing to do. He must take her against her will and explain afterward when they could find a French interpreter. So he seized her in his arms.

It was like grasping a wildcat. Her fury was marvelous. She beat him in the face with her clenched fists. She scratched and kicked and even attempted to bite. In doing so her warm red lips came close to his, making his senses reel, till he did not mind the pain. The more she fought the tighter he held her. Thus slowly he made his way to the beach where Fernay Corday kept his canoes, and there he beheld Jolly Cauldron calmly awaiting him.

"Hello, dog," he drawled; "you're getting more playful than a kitten. Up to new pranks every day."

At JOLLY CAULDRON's words, Guy released his hold on the struggling Kum-Kum. Instantly she broke from him and rushed to Jolly Cauldron's arms. Had she turned to stone before him, Guy could not have been more surprized. Speechless with amazement, he watched

her lift her warm lips to Jolly Cauldron. It was blasphemy; yet before it Guy was powerless. He could not attempt further to release Kum-Kum from a state which was satisfactory to her.

Standards of beauty are different the world over. The Chinese girl binds up her feet until she is a virtual cripple. The Siamese belle puts brass rings about her neck, rings that are riveted on never to be removed. At intervals others are added until her neck is eight or ten inches long. Beauty in some sections of Africa consists of putting huge chunks of cork through the lobes of the ears until they dangle almost to the shoulders, gruesome pendants of flesh. In Borneo the natives prick their faces with needles until they bleed, and daub the raw wounds with bits of cotton until the fuzzy appearance of their skins make it seem as though they have been out in a blizzard. And all this is done in the name of beauty, in order to attract attention. Beauty in the eyes of such people has a far different meaning from what it has to us. Therefore it is not so absurd that Kum-Kum, who had always lived in the South Seas, should be influenced by South Sea standards. To her, Jolly Cauldron was not repulsive. His very wildness was attractive to her. She admired his forcefulness, his strength and his courage.

At heart we are all pagans. The veneer of civilization is very thin.

"I told you in the beginning," said Jolly Cauldron, "when we started our civilization on this island that there was one man too many. Any community that has more than one man cannot get along. Therefore you've got to go. The canoe is ready. I fixed it myself. Last night when I saw you slink from the house like a snake I imagined that you were desirous of using one, so I circled down to the beach. I prepared everything for you. No one can say that I am not willing to do my share of work."

As he spoke he struck Guy upon the mouth so terrifically that he went sprawling in a heap a dozen feet away. He groaned slightly. Blood flowed from his lips. As he fell, Kum-Kum sprang forward. She stooped over him and pressed her lips to his. As consciousness departed, he felt happier than Pygmalion. Pain was forgotten, blood mattered not at all. Kum-Kum had kissed him. He was richer than kings.

Jolly Cauldron lifted his inert body and cast it into the canoe. He pushed it away from the beach, wading out until the water was above his waist to make sure it would catch the current. Then he returned and took Kum-Kum into his arms.

Meanwhile Guy lay sprawled in the canoe like a lifeless thing. His forehead was burning. It was not the sun that made the air so hot. It was his brain. Fever had returned to him. The water was yellow-gold. The sky, too, was of an orange coppery hue. So humid was the air it seemed to have a luminous texture, a tapestry of bronze out of which might have been fashioned a gorgeous garment for Kum-Kum. The far horizon was not visible. Sky, sea and air all were blended in one molten ball of haze.

Guy gazed foolishly about. Life was flowing past him. All things moved. Only he was inert. Gradually his reasonings became more incoherent. He tried to distinguish souls in the air about him. He gazed intently into the vivid golden haze, and as he gazed, it seemed as though he saw a schooner bearing down upon him, a schooner with all sails set, speeding toward him as silently and beautiful as though it were part of the mist. As he beheld it, the last spark of his reason flickered out, for he recognized *The Poppy Pearl*, as smart and trim as

the day she first sailed; and yet *The Poppy Pearl* lay a moldering, shapeless thing on the reefs, her back broken, her masts and rigging converted into huts. Nearer and nearer came the phantom ship. It was the most tremendous moment of Guy's life. He was the first man who had ever pierced the film of reality and peered into the spirit world. He fell forward, babbling like an idiot.

When he opened his eyes, he lay in a snug, comfortable berth. His head still throbbed, but rationality had returned to him. He surveyed his surroundings. If it were *The Poppy Pearl* she must have been completely rebuilt. She was certainly greatly improved. He had not slept in such a comfortable bunk for ages. The cool freshness of the pillow was like a tonic to him. The fire in his brain had subsided. He had been drawn back into the tide of life again. He wondered whither the ship was bound. His bunk was spotlessly clean. That proved beyond a doubt that he was not on *The Poppy Pearl.*

He was interrupted in his musings by the entrance of a man in uniform, evidently the captain. He had a broad, good-natured red face and appeared to be English. Guy looked up into his face.

"Where is Jolly Cauldron?" he asked whimsically.

"Who's he?"

"My Nemesis. Don't you know that every man has a Nemesis constantly on his trail? Even children are told that the hobgoblin will get them if they don't watch out. The hobgoblin's name is Jolly Cauldron. He is my Nemesis, my shadow. Scientists tell us that a man can not escape from his shadow. For months my shadow and I lived on an island reasonably contented; although he was an ill-bred shadow, always in front of me, never behind. A shadow that is refined and cultured always steps out of the way when you want to go anywhere, but mine always blocked me. He made me go where he wanted. We started a new civilization on the island and with reasonable success. But it was a place of shadows and dreams. It was no place for me. So my shadow picked me up and threw me into a canoe, which was carried by the current into the golden mists of morning. Now I'm a man without a shadow. I'm as badly off as a ghost. When I return to New York it will be very embarrassing."

The captain chuckled. "Glad to see you're a bit better," he said. "When we picked you up your head was so hot we could have fried an egg on it. You've had a touch of sun."

"Only a touch?" grinned Guy. "Why, man, I've been living in it!"

The captain smiled. "As long as we'll perhaps be together for a while," he said, "I think I'll introduce myself. My name is Binns. This schooner is *The Georgiana.* I own her. I am a trader in pearls when I am not exploring the little-known islands of Polynesia. Just now I am bound for Papeete, the Paris of the South Seas, where dwell the happiest, wickedest people in the world. From there I shall jump a long distance to Singapore, which is the Highway of the World. Want to come along?"

"Yes," was the slow reply. "If I go with you to Singapore I am sure to get away from the South Seas. Maybe my nerves are unstrung, but I can't help but think that the coral beaches of Polynesia are as deadly as any malady."

When the veil of night commenced to settle over the waters, Guy stood in the stern of the ship and watched the blood-burning sun slip down below the far horizon. The dream was ended. There were no more ghosts. He was going home.

Song of the Necromancer

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

I will repeat a subtle rune—
  And thronging suns of Otherwhere
  Shall blaze upon the blinded air,
  And specters terrible and fair
Shall walk the riven world at noon.

The star that was mine empery
  Is dust upon unwinnowed skies:
  But primal dreams have made me wise,
  And soon the shattered years shall rise
To my remembered sorcery.

To mantic mutterings, brief and low,
  My palaces shall lift amain,
  My bowers bloom; I will regain
  The lips whereon my lips have lain
In rose-red twilights long ago.

Before my murmured exorcism,
  The world, a wispy wraith, shall flee:
  A stranger earth, a weirder sea,
  Peopled with shapes of Faëry,
Shall swell upon the waste abysm.

The pantheons of darkened stars
  Shall file athwart the crocus dawn;
  Goddess and Gorgon, Lar and faun
  Shall tread the amaranthine lawn,
And giants fight their thunderous wars.

Like graven mountains of basalt,
  Dark idols of my demons there
  Shall tower through bright zones of air,
  Fronting the sun with level stare;
And hell shall pave my deepest vault.

Phantom and fiend and sorcerer
  Shall serve me . . . till my term shall pass,
  And I become no more, alas!
  Than a frail shadow on the glass
Before some latter conjurer.

"Reluctantly, gingerly, he leaned across the narrow body slumbering beneath him."

At the Time Appointed

By LORETTA BURROUGH

The father hated his son with a vindictive hatred, all because of a childhood accident—and his hatred culminated in a ghastly jest, there in the silent tomb

NOW that Nick Carruthers had the letter in his hand, it seemed amazing to him that he could have gone about the shabby business of his daily life—getting a scanty breakfast, poring for hours over thumbed racing-sheets while he made his desperate guesses—with it lying all the morning

outside his door. He had heard it thump down while he was still in bed, and the *concierge* shuffle away, list slippers flopping, and not stirred, thinking, "Another damn bill!"

Even when he had finally opened his door and picked the letter up, nothing had moved in him at the black lines of the return address in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope. He had forgotten that Stevens and Brewster were his father's attorneys; looking at the blue United States stamp, he had almost forgotten that he had ever been a citizen of that land. It had been forwarded three times, following him on his ever downward passage through meaner streets to meaner rooming-houses.

Sitting now on his rumpled bed, he lighted a cigarette with unsteady fingers and reread the letter. The green bank draft for a thousand dollars was folded into his pocket, sitting snugly next to his heart.

The letter ran:

Dear Mr. Carruthers,

We regret to inform you of the death of your father on September 12th last. According to the terms of his will, everything that he possesses has been left to you.

There is, however, a rather curious circumstance connected with this. At the time of his death, he had converted all his securities, real estate, etc., into cash with which he bought precious stones—you are no doubt aware of his great interest in gems. We have no knowledge as to the disposition of this large fortune in jewels, but we have in our possession a sealed letter for you, which the will states contains information of the whereabouts of your inheritance. We will appreciate it if you will let us know when we may expect you in our office.

According to your late father's instructions, we are forwarding a bank draft for one thousand dollars.

Cordially yours,
EVAN W. STEVENS.

Nick was stunned by his good fortune—this magical draft that would set him free from his horrible life here, and beyond that the pouring torrent of his father's millions, glittering and winking in emeralds and rubies and many-faceted gleaming diamonds. It was incredible, it was glorious! What had happened in the old devil's heart that had permitted his hated son to inherit?

He got up from the bed and crossed to the window. Flat gray clouds hung from the muggy October sky, close to those acres of bleak dirty roofs and chimney-pots; Parisian squalor, he thought, was filthier than any other kind. Automobiles chugged and hurried; grimy people scurried through the streets.

He threw up the window and leaned out into the fetid air. "Good-bye!" he shouted to the oblivious heads below, then came back into the room.

He must get some clothes first, so that he should not look too much like a tramp on the boat going over. And then pay his bills and buy his passage—he was dazed by remembering how brightly the sun shone on the Atlantic, and how clean and free was ocean air.

Whistling a little, he began to tidy up the room; his thousand-dollar draft had given him the respectable instincts of a clean man again, not a bum. So Father was paying him back at last for his horrible childhood and wretched youth! Roger Carruthers must have got religion on his death bed.

His face shadowed, Nick began to get into his one half-way decent suit. All that hate and savage cruelty because of a child's innocent terrible accident! He had been six years old when it happened, too young to know what he was doing. He had been playing alone in the library. A rainy day; he remembered clearly the rain slanting down the long windows, rushing with soft thundering sounds from the leaden gutters. There had been a gun, blue and heavy in his small hands, that Father had kept in the right-hand drawer of the library table; for

even in those days, he owned too many precious stones and feared robbers. Nick had been playing he was Father, protecting his jewels against burglars. Mother, smiling, had come in the door, and he had pointed the gun at her, said "Boo!" and pulled the trigger with all the strength of his small hands.

Knotting his tie before the cracked, brown-spotted mirror, Nick drew a long sigh. Aimed by fate, by devils, by anything but his luckless clumsiness, the bullet had shot straight for his mother's heart, and almost before he had known that his world was ended, she had lain dead upon the floor, scarlet spreading out into the white muslin flounces beneath her breast.

His father had run into the room, his face white as the muslin gown. He had looked at Mother upon the floor and Nick crying because his hand hurt and the gun had made such a noise and he was frightened, and then Father's huge fist had smashed down upon him and Nick had remembered nothing more of that scene. Yes, his father had loved Mother as he had loved his beautiful jewels, with an insane idolatry. And Nick had killed her.

As he thought of the hell his childhood had been from that time on, Nick's face darkened. This bequest was a late reward for cruelty, for what he had endured. He was marked until he died by the things that had happened to him, the years that he had dragged out in wretched homes, more wretched schools, everywhere finding that the story he had killed his mother had preceded him. At eighteen, the bare grudging subsistence he had received from his father, whom he had never seen since the day of his mother's death, had ceased, and, ill prepared, he had been thrown into a bad world.

Nick closed his door behind him. The hall smelled of cabbage, peppery French dishes, and unwashed stairs. Well, the amends were late but they had come; he was through with hell. His lips formed a whistle again; he smiled at the *concierge's* bearded face, looking up at him suspiciously.

BEYOND the windows of Stevens and Brewster's New York office, pigeons wheeled in the sun. Nick contemplated the sealed letter addressed to him, the neatly wrapped small box, lying in his hands. "So really," he said, tapping the letter, "unless I find in this the answer to what Father did with his fortune, I'm no better off than before?"

"It amounts to that," Mr. Stevens admitted. "As I told you, as soon as he knew he would not recover, he began to convert everything he possessed—real estate, securities—into jewels. A queer business—you must realize he took terrific losses doing it—without turning a hair."

Nick watched the gray-feathered pigeons turning in the sun an instant, and then he said bitterly, "It can't be any news to you, Mr. Stevens, that my father hated me. Perhaps this is his latest joke at my expense—I can hardly believe that he really meant me to be his heir." He pocketed the thick letter and the little box.

"It was too bad, terrible," Mr. Stevens said uncomfortably. "A childish accident, a pity!" He moved his dry white hands together on his desk. "You are his heir, however, right enough, if you can only locate your heirdom. Of course you have the house. You might sell it—although a place like that, a castle really, is a white elephant on this market."

"I dare say I shall go up and look it over," Nick said, picking up the keys from the desk. "Any servants there?"

"No—they were dismissed after Mr. Carruthers' death, by his instructions. It's clean, though—a woman goes in to sweep and air it every two weeks."

"I'll very likely go there then," Nick said, rising. "Many thanks, Mr. Stevens. I'll let you know what I find out." He tapped his pocket where the letter lay.

"Yes, do," Mr. Stevens said, as though he should very much like to know now. "Such a curious thing—to have no idea what my own client did with his vast personal fortune!"

Nick came out into the clean sharp October day, looked at the bustling streets, then hailed a yellow cab. "Will you take me up to Canobus?" he said. "It's a little way above Irvington."

"Kinda far," the driver said, "but I'll take you."

SETTLED against the comfortable leather seat, Nick took out the letter and the small box. Well, in a few minutes he would know whether he was a tremendously rich man, or the duped victim of a practical joke. The cab swayed and dove through the crowded sunlit streets as he unfolded the double sheets of rich heavy paper.

"My dear Son——" Nick made a small snorting sound, his jaw muscles bunching angrily, then read on:

You must permit an old and sorrowing man to make amends to you. In the clear light of approaching death, mistakes shine out with a terrible brilliance. I realize now that my behavior toward you has been unspeakably cruel, punishing a youth, a young man, for what an innocent child did in his ignorance. I have been longing to make amends for years, always hoping that we would meet again at the time appointed, but I have been held back and hampered by the natural shame of a father who dares not approach the son he has so irreparably injured.

You are aware by now that I have converted all my fortune into gems, ignorance of the whereabouts of which must have confused and annoyed Stevens greatly!

I hope you will forgive the gruesome and perhaps repugnant enterprise you will have to embark upon in order to enter into your inheritance. It will seem to you so much simpler if I had merely put the stones into a bank where you could have obtained them at the slight cost of your signature upon a slip of paper.

But as death crept closer, I found myself increasingly reluctant to part with my beautiful glittering baubles. You don't know the fascination that gems can have for a man, bewitching him with the play of their glorious fire so much more brilliant than anything upon this earth!

Nick raised his eyes, puzzled. Where was all this leading? He returned again to the letter:

To shorten the story, buried with me in my coffin in the mausoleum on the estate are three million dollars in jewels. Forgive me the queer quirk that made me keep them with me as long as I could—I felt that I could not die were it otherwise.

No one is aware of this except you. The coffin was specially made; the workmen were ignorant of the purpose for which they prepared a wooden case and fitted it into the hollow lid. To the eye, then, nothing but a surface of quilted satin—but underneath, the glories of heaven await you! Access to it is easy—pressure upon the third and fourth buttons from the bottom of the lid on the left hand side will release the catch.

I am apologetic that I have put this disagreeable and oppressive task upon you—but you will find it in your heart to forgive an old man's folly. The gems are all I say they are—you may do with them as you will—convert them into stocks and bonds and houses—or simply fall in love with them as I did.

The small box which Stevens will give you contains the keys to the mausoleum. Do not tell anyone of your errand in the tomb, and remove the gems alone—I do not desire to have any but my son look upon me in death. I trust that enjoyment of your possessions will compensate you for the unhappiness and misery of your early life. I am sorry that our first greeting in thirty years must take place in my tomb. God be with you, my son; I shall meet you there.

Your loving father,
ROGER CARRUTHERS.

Nick lighted a cigarette, his fingers slow, eyes unaware of the fantasmagoria of red and green lights, dashing cars, that flashed past the windows. Living alone at Green Oaks with his beautiful gems and wretched memories, Father must have turned slowly crazed. What a gruesome, singular thing to do! What a horrible task he had inherited, along with three million dollars in jewels! Grave robbery—it was no better than that.

Nick reread the letter, a little puzzled. He still could not believe that that wicked and vengeful old man could have forgiven him at last—yet there it was, speak-

ing from the crabbed rambling handwriting.

With a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, he contemplated what he must do. Either he went through with it, or he stayed penniless. He had been poor too long to have any illusions about it. Robbing a dead man's coffin would be a task disagreeable enough, but not half so disagreeable as a life without money, battered from pillar to post by creditors.

He opened the small box; it contained two keys, labeled *Inside, Outside.* He could barely remember the old mausoleum, erected hundreds of years ago when it was not forbidden by law to inter bodies on private grounds. Made of marble once white, no doubt, but then stained dark by time and the weeping branches of the willow trees planted about it. A gloomy spot—a young child, he had not gone near that part of the estate often. The tomb, he recalled with difficulty, had beautiful colored glass windows, heavy bronze doors.

Nick was untroubled by superstitious fancies about darkness; he thought that tonight would be as good a time as any. What would he need for this unpleasant foray? He listed in his mind the necessities: a lantern, a chisel or two, a screwdriver, a suitcase for the gems. This bag at his feet, emptied out, would do well. As soon as he had the stones, he would leave for New York and register at one of the big hotels; he did not care to stay the night in the lonely house, three million dollars in gems in his possession. Then, early tomorrow, they could go into a bank—from Mr. Stevens he could obtain advice on converting them into sources of income. He did not intend to keep them as they were. Jewels were nothing to him; you could not eat jewels, nor drink them—you could fill the hunger of your eyes with more beautiful things.

A lantern, he thought; yes, chisels, a screw-driver, perhaps a hammer or wrench, that's what I'll need.

Old Mrs. Briggs, who had just finished her job of cleaning the house, looked out the window, hands on her hips.

"Oh, you couldn't *make* me stay here at night," she said. "I tell Bob—that's my son—'Now you be sure and show up before sun-down, or I'll give you what for.' He calls for me in his car, you know."

She turned back to Nick, smiling at him. "I want my five dollars every two weeks for cleaning up here, right enough, but you couldn't make me stay on a regular over-night job. Sleep in, I mean, not me!"

"Why not?" Nick said absently. The crimson sun was setting in an October sky; the fire Mrs. Briggs had built on the hearth for him felt very fine. "It's a big lonely house, of course. And I suppose any house that's seen death recently seems haunted to other people, doesn't it?"

"Not exactly haunted. What bothers me"— Mrs. Briggs pointed out the window—"is *that* out there. Who wants to see a tomb right out his front window, I don't know. Your pa did. Loved to look at it. Oh, he *was* a queer old bird." In sudden confusion, Mrs. Briggs chewed her lip.

"That's all right, Mrs. Briggs," Nick said amiably. "I guess he was. But just how do you mean, queer? I haven't seen him in years."

"Oh——" Mrs. Briggs seemed to be casting about for words. "Well, *queer.* Funny about that do-fangle out there, for one thing. You know when he heard he was going to die, he got a gang of workmen at it, fixing it up, doing Lord knows what. Anybody who went near it got chased right away. They worked at it for

weeks—a bunch of foreigners—they couldn't speak no language we all could, anyway."

With both forefingers punched into her round dimpled cheeks, she contemplated Nick.

"Your pa wasn't liked in the village. He was a vengeful unforgiving man, never let up on anybody he hated. And he himself had built a coffin, grand thing that it was! All silver, too big for *him*, I always said, withering away as he was—cancer, you know." Her tongue clucked pityingly. "But keeping that coffin in his bedroom with him, right beside his bed! Don't you think *that's* queer?"

"Slightly," Nick said, looking out at the tomb.

The setting sun hit the coppery cross on its top, sparkling above the dull time-blackened walls, with a gloomy light of its own. There was nothing cheerful about the mausoleum or this house. Well, he would not be here much longer. He would put the place on the market; anyone who wanted it could buy it, tomb and all.

A car had just rattled up the drive. "I think that must be your son, Mrs. Briggs," Nick said. "Big black Buick?"

"That's Bob."

Mrs. Briggs put on her coat quickly.

"If I were you, Mr. Carruthers," she said, looking back at him, "I'd trot right into town with Bob and me. To my mind, this here place ain't healthy in the dark."

"Oh, thanks," he said. "I shan't stay more than an hour or so longer. Good-night."

When the car had sputtered away again down the drive, silence descended on the house, the creaking silence of a place of many shut-up rooms, long dark passages, great empty attics—the silence seemed to spread away from about Nick and the small study, lighted by the leaping fire. Frowning, he looked out at the darkening tomb. The sooner this disagreeable job was over, the better.

He lifted the receiver of the telephone on the desk, wondering if it were still connected; he would need a taxi later. Yes, a quiet humming buzz like the noise of a hive of bees came from it. Now where would he find the needed things? The house was a wealthy house, beautifully equipped. But it was not his, it was a stranger's—he didn't know where anything was. Tools would be somewhere about the working part of the house, the kitchens, the garage, the potting-sheds. The list of things he wanted began going through his head: chisels, lantern. . . .

He turned and looked back. The lighted study windows showed warm and homely. Moving his coat collar up about his ears, Nick shivered a little. The light of the bobbing lantern shone on silvery frost like jewels on the grass, the dark trees upon whose bare branches a few late-October leaves of scarlet and yellow lingered still. The air was very cold and crisp, with the odor of wood smoke from the chimney behind him tingling in it.

Five minutes more of brisk walking brought him after a turn in the path face to face with the dark bulking shadows of the mausoleum. The heavy outer bronze doors, greenish and corroded by time, were twice as high as his head, although he was a tall man; the glass of the colored windows gave back the winking lantern-light. There was not much oil in the lantern, but it should be sufficient for the half-hour he would spend here.

A depressing spot, he thought, listening to a light breath of wind go softly through the almost leafless trees as he fumbled with the key marked *Outside*. He had no stomach for the job. Who would? Entering the tomb that held the

mother you had killed, the father who had hated you.

The key slipped in the oiled wards of the heavy lock and turned. The ponderous door swung toward him in his hand. He stood in the little vestibule of the tomb, facing the inner doors, of glass with a bronze tracery over them. Looking in, he held his lantern high.

The first rays of the wintry early-rising moon sent gules of red, lozenges of pale blue, through the stained glass windows to the marble floor. Marble everywhere, gray-white and cold—a tall black altar at one end with a crucifix above it. Below the altar, and on each side, were inscribed slabs that covered the niches which held the coffins.

Nicholas hesitated, his hand upon the key in the lock. There was something forbidding about that desolate interior, a silent, unspoken *Hands off!*—as though the dead men and women in there were aware of him, an intruder from the living, and wished him ill.

Nonsense! he thought, reassuring himself deliberately, banishing that shadow across his mind that perhaps his father had not really forgiven him, and some grim jest, some final terrible treachery waited him should he open this door. A phrase from the letter floated unpleasantly in his brain as he turned the key: *I shall meet you there.*

A wave of damp freezing air, biting through his thin coat, stabbing disagreeably into his lungs, came forth to meet him. With a deliberate caution, he removed the key from the outside and replaced it in the inside of the door—he did not intend to be shut in here by any accident of the wind that might close the door and snap the spring lock upon him.

Picking up his suitcase of tools and the lantern, he moved into the center of the tomb, frowning. How still it was here, shut in by tons and tons of marble! His footfalls sounded like thunder, the oil sliding in the lantern like a waterfall. Shadows billowed away from him into the dark dusty corners, as the lantern-light flickered over names of long-forgotten men and women, Esmond Carruthers, John Carruthers, Amable Carruthers. And under the altar, his father and mother, Enid and Roger.

He set the lantern on a prie-dieu whose brown wooden top was beaded with a pale dew of damp, and wiped his hands in whose cold palms sweat had started. He liked his task less and less with every silent moment; he should have waited until morning. Wholesome sun would have chased this atmosphere. But since he was here——

He strode quickly to the tomb beneath the altar, wishing that he could rid his shoulder-blades of the curious feeling they seemed to have of many eyes upon them, and seized the bronze handles that protruded from the slab which said *Roger Carruthers,* Born 1860, Died 1935. A long life.

A quick strong tug, with all his strength behind it, and the great drawer that held the casket moved out toward him; it was like a large silvery fish, sliding from the darkness. A man's last house, he thought, and bent above it. The silence, the shadows, made him curiously uncomfortable; he wished himself away, and yet was too stubborn to go.

Had it been screwed down? He had brought a heavy screw-driver. No, it was secured by great bronze catches in several places. He raised them one by one; the metal was very cold and nipped at his fingers like icy claws. He drew back for an instant in a sudden quivering disgust; a fat black spider had slid over the side, retreating into the shadows of a far corner. Then he snapped open the last catch, and raised the heavy lid of the casket, straining upward with his shoulder, sud-

denly retreating as it opened and came to rest.

But the embalmer had done his work well; there was no rush of foul air. The withered body of the old man that lay inside, dressed in fine morning coat, dark trousers, wing collar, black bow tie, looked almost as though it slept, like a long doll with closed waxen eyes. But after a moment, Nick, standing there not too close, his legs unwilling, saw that death had been at work. His father's face bore green-yellow streaks; there was a spot of pale blue mold upon the white collar. The narrow sunken smile upon the mouth held a puzzling meaning that eluded Nick, looking at it.

RELUCTANTLY, gingerly, he leaned across the narrow body slumbering beneath him and sought with his fingers the third and fourth buttons in the quilted satin lid of the casket, his hand slipping across the beautiful satin until he found them and pressed, holding his breath. A section of the satin dropped toward him gently, revealing a long, hollowed space behind it, and a shining case of red mahogany standing upright there, bronze springs securing it to the back of the lid.

God! he thought, his hands suddenly itching as he eagerly pried it out and carried it away to the prie-dieu. He forgot about the dead man lying behind him, the swooping shadows, the bone-searching cold. There was a key tied to one of the handles. Fascinated, oblivious to his surroundings, he opened the box, his fingers vibrating with eagerness, the breath fleeing from his lungs in a gasp as the lid went up.

Glorious, impossible! The magical beauty of wonderful gems flowed before him in the lantern-light. In waves like tides, their flaunting colors came at him as the light flickered, tides of green and gold and blood-red, milky hues like a dawn sea. Then the colors steadied and he hung above them breathlessly, hardly daring to finger them, absorbed, enchanted.

It was many minutes before a thought stirred in his mind, like the faint feathered wing-edge of anxiety, What's happened to the lantern-light? What makes it so steady? Why isn't it shifting any more in the wind? And that sound—that faint, clicking, ticking sound like the wheels of well-oiled mechanism running together—what is that? He became suddenly aware that the sound had commenced when he released the bronze catches that had held the jewel-case to the back of the coffin lid; in his excitement over the gems, he had noticed the noise and yet not noticed it.

He wheeled and stared at the inner door of the mausoleum. Instead of an oblong of trees and moonlight, he saw dully reflecting glass; the door was shut. That was why the lantern cast rays of solid motionless yellow all about him—there was no wind to shake it any more. He hurried to the closed door, reassuring himself a little uneasily: I prepared for that, I left the key inside, I'm all right. But how had the gentle soft-blowing night wind pushed to that ponderous casing of bronze and glass? Queer!

He turned the key quickly, listening to it clicking in the spring lock. Then he put his shoulder to the door and shoved. It leaped an inch and stopped, with a thundering metal clang.

Bewildered, the first sharp stirrings of alarm stepping up the beat of his heart to a regular thud-thud-thud against his ribs, he peered through the heavy plate glass. Just outside the door, two gleaming steel bars held it fast; the bronze, striking them, had made that mournful clang like the sound of a brazen gong. They had not been there when he

entered. Of course they had not been there; if they had been, he could not have got in. Someone outside was playing a joke that was not funny.

"Hey!" he shouted, suddenly beating with his fist against the glass in a fury, half of alarm for the safety of his jewels, half for his own. A tramp, seeing him in there, might have thought it an excellent opportunity, once Nick was safely locked up, to burgle the house. "Let me out of here, you fool!"

His hands up against the glass, cupping his eyes from the lantern-light behind him, he stared into the moonlight. There was no one there; nothing moved but a few dark leaves, spiraling softly in the light wind.

"Hey——" he said again, his voice lowering, growing puzzled and uncertain.

And then he saw suddenly that there was something queer about the line of trees and sky outside the door; they were gliding out of view as if they were being gobbled up—as if a knife cut into it, the pattern of pale icy moonlight on the marble floor of the vestibule was with every moment sliced smaller and smaller. He looked upward, his hands still against the glass.

Between the inner door and the outer, with a faint velvety racket of oiled wheels, a steel wall was sliding down. Even as he watched its relentless, almost noiseless passage, his throat growing dry, a vein beating heavily in his head, the bottom of the steel curtain reached the floor and came to rest against the marble with a dull ringing sound. Where the friendly outdoors had been, of moonlight and trees and the moving wind, there was now a barrier of seamless gray steel.

He stumbled back from the door, his hands for a moment wild, fluttering. And then he thought quickly, I must not lose my head! There were the windows; the heavy prie-dieu, swung with determination, would smash them into bits of colored glass, would make an exit for him.

He grabbed up the prie-dieu, unaware of its weight swinging at his arms, and stumbled to the nearest window. Almost as he reached it, there came a soft dull echo of metal clanging against stone. Beyond the stained glass shone no comforting moon; the pale window was opaque now, flat-looking, like a diseased eye. Between him and the living world another barrier of steel had slid down swiftly, almost noiselessly. And even as he stood there, panting, from about him came soft gentle clangs, like the beating of gongs, as curtain after metal curtain behind the other windows slid shut and locked him in.

He remained there a moment, standing stupidly, staring at the scroll beneath the figure of the drooping woman on the glass that said *Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.* And then, with a gasp, he swung the prie-dieu. Glass crashed about him, flying past his ears, tinkling to the floor like a shower of bells. The heavy prayer-bench shattered and splintered against the closed steel shutter, and dropped to the floor. The steel had not moved; the only signs of his assault upon it were a few long bright scratches.

His heart began to thunder in his breast; a rivulet of sweat ran down across his quivering ribs. With his hands pressed against his temples, he tried to think, his eyes roving desperately into dark corners, retiring baffled from the walls of marble and steel that hemmed him in. He understood now that it was no outside hand that had rolled these curtains down between him and life. Oh, he should have listened to the old woman and her gabble of foreign workmen and the tomb! He should have believed the

instinctive knowledge of his heart, that his father had never ceased to hate him, and never would.

Now, he thought, I must be calm, and figure a way out! His trembling fingers locked together, he stood in the center of the tomb; dark in a corner of his brain, like a beast that would slay him, waited panic. Unaware that he was gnawing his knuckles, panting like a dog, he faced what it was he had to face—no one except Mrs. Briggs knew he was at the estate, and he had told her he was not staying. No matter what happened, it would be two weeks before she would be back. And by that time——

With a gasp, he snatched up the broken prie-dieu, and one by one, battered at the windows until the floor was littered with shattered glass and the prayer-bench nothing but a few sticks of splintered wood in his hands. The steel shutters, hardly marred, had not yielded an inch. Reduced to his bare hands, he smashed at the steel foolishly with his fists, stopping at last only when his knuckles were bloodied and pain shot up his arms.

For a long while then, he stumbled blindly about the mausoleum, seeking like a trapped and terrified animal, a way out, stopping now and then to cry for help, his voice thrown back at him torn and distorted by the hollow echoing dome, until at last he returned to the center of the mausoleum and stood there, trembling. His underclothing was soaked with sweat. Just beyond waited the panic he had feared; he was very thirsty and the pain in his injured hands was almost intolerable.

And then, with a nip of terror about his heart, he saw that it was growing darker in the small rounded room; the oil in the lantern had almost run out. In the silence above his hoarse gasping breath, he could hear the mild sputtering of the drying wick as it sought for oil in the empty reservoir. How softly and gently the light faded, how softly and patiently the shadows advanced from the dark corners, an inch at a time! He had knocked into and upset the case of jewels a moment ago. Spilled everywhere upon the floor, the fire of them was diminishing and fading too, as though they had no life away from light, and now lay dying.

Awaiting the terror of darkness, his legs gave way beneath him, and he sank to the littered floor, his breath coming and going weakly at his lips. Did that small sound of sobbing come from his lips too? His eyes, turning desperately, yet once more, before the last moment when he could see nothing, came to rest upon the still face of the body in the casket.

The meaning of the smile upon those sunken waxen lips was plain to him now. The very last light in the darkening room seemed to linger upon that bitterly mocking grin of triumph.

The blue bubble dancing upon the wick faded, faded—and the dark came down.

Glory Hand

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

An odd and curious story about a weird fetish that carried death.

IN THE morning he went to the offices of Judah and McCallum, Barristers, in Lincoln's Inn Fields and presented himself in response to their letter: an elderly gentleman with sideburns, spectacles and a vagueness about his eyes; of medium height and weight, typically English, like a faded print of John Bull. Announcing him, the girl said, "He looks like a country vicar: low church."

He went into the inner office and settled himself to hear about his eccentric uncle's will. He said, "Gentlemen, I am a scholar and have work to do: I will appreciate being spared unnecessary detail."

They told him what he had inherited, computed the Crown's share, gave him the key to the old house in Tavistock Square and freed him. He wandered over to the Museum and forgot about his inheritance for two days, and then, remembering, went over to the house and opened it up. He thought of it only as he had always seen it: an old dwelling surrounded by trees and bushes, of two stories, with red curtains at the windows. A strange place. But his uncle had been stranger: fretful hypochondriac, to be sure, and certainly a trifle unbalanced. He had nothing but kind thoughts for the old man whose ashes had been taken out to sea.

The place smelled closed: not musty, nor of dust, but the smell of being kept from air for a while. He opened a few windows and went from room to room. They were all in good order except the old man's bedroom, which was a mess of miscellany: maps on the walls, astrological charts, chalk marks on the floor, books on witchcraft and wizardry abounding, and various pieces of furniture in no semblance of good taste. On the whole, however, he liked the house and decided forthwith to move into it: in his leisure he could manage to clean it up.

So it was fully ten days after he moved in that he got to the Sheraton table in the corner of the closet off the old man's bedroom. Until that day he had slept on the couch downstairs, but the bedroom with its large windows appealed to him suddenly, and he made it his own. He had to clean out the maps and charts, he arranged the books, and the room emerged more presentable and, indeed, attractive, well lighted and large enough to accommodate his things. He decided to leave the Sheraton table, since it would serve as a place to work, and could hold many of his books. Looking around for room to keep his papers, he hit upon the secret drawer quite by accident. It slid protestingly into sight and exposed a small collection to his gaze.

The drawer was far too small for any practical use, but he examined the objects it contained with considerable interest. There were: a small spool of rather discolored white string; a piece of parchment bearing a Latin scrawl that read, "Let his heart be free of evil, who touches me; Let no evil wish cross his lips, who owns me;" a collar button; a small black date-book or journal; a brown, wrinkled object with the feel of leather to it; and a yellowed opera program from Covent Garden. He took them

up one by one: the spool of string, the collar button, and the open program he dropped into the waste-basket: the parchment and the journal he left in the drawer: the wrinkled leathery object he put into the pocket of his smoking-jacket for later examination. Of course, with his typical absentmindedness, he forgot all about it in an hour or two, and night had fallen then.

He went downstairs and picked up the *News of the World,* and there he saw that Professor Lennox had preceded him again, this time with his paper on the probable age of the Easter Island discoveries. He was justly angry: it was the fourth time such a thing had happened.

"A pox on him!" he said. "I wish he were dead!" But after a moment he smiled humorlessly, ruefully, and told himself it served him right for doddering about so and growing daily more forgetful. At this moment he felt something very like a pinch in his thigh: he clapped his hand to his trousers, thinking something in his pocket was pushing into his flesh, but there was nothing. Then, just as he was settling himself again, it seemed to him that one pocket of his smoking-jacket had grown heavier. He rose up out of his chair to examine it, but at that instant his pocket was light again, as if a weight had been removed from it; there was an odd momentary pressure against his trousers leg, but when he looked down, it was gone: there was nothing there. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw a rat scuttling off into the dark, but an intensive search with more light later showed him nothing.

THERE was something strange about the incident, but he attributed it to his imagination and rested easily about it: it was precisely that which kept Alexander Harrick always second to other scholars, this ability to forget things or to seek out any easily available explanation. After a while, he went up to bed, delaying still further his Easter Island paper; though he reflected sadly that there was now no longer any need for haste.

In the morning he got to work again, he ate a little something to spare himself the trouble of going out, and it was evening before he saw a paper and read about Professor Lennox. He was horrified, he was profoundly shocked; he got up and called the family and offered his condolences, which was unusual enough for him. And he came back to the paper and read the story again, the remarkable and rather mystifying account of how Professor Lennox had been strangled to death last night in a narrow lane near his home: the mark of a powerful hand still clearly seen: but no money, no valuables of any kind taken, not even an ancient scarab the professor had in his pocket. Scotland Yard was on the case, of course: this gave Harrick a certain amount of smug satisfaction: he felt that the Yard would quickly bring the murderer to justice, and deservedly so. He did no work all evening, and thought only about Lennox's terrible death and of how that left only Trefethn and him at work on the Easter Island pieces.

Harrick was wrong about Scotland Yard: in a month's time they had made no progress at all, the case had been taken out of the papers long since, and Harrick himself had largely forgotten it: he was in the midst of a battle with Trefethn, carried on largely over the telephone, and Trefethn had taken to calling him up late at night, thinking nothing of it, routing him from bed and expounding his latest theory. It was enough to try the patience of a Job, and one night it was too much for Alexander Harrick. He lost his temper, something snapped, and he shouted, "Trefethn, I wish you were out in the fifth dimension, if there

is such a thing. Call me up tomorrow: I need sleep!" and hung up the telephone.

It was a moonlit night, and the moon edged its beams into the room despite the trees around the house. As he lay there in bed, preparatory to sleep, congratulating himself upon having told Trefethn how he felt for once, and yet feeling a lurking shame at his impatience with a fellow scholar, he was conscious of a slight movement near the door, midway between ceiling and floor: a soft rustling sound: and, listening a moment, he determined that it must come from his smoking-jacket. He waited breathlessly and heard a faint tapping sound on the floor, a scuffling on the carpet. He was just about to step silently from bed and put on the light when he saw something scuttle across the patch of moonlight on the floor near the window, and instinctively his eyes raised to the sill, and he saw something again. It was incredible, a dark something like a hand with fingers, a hand walking on fingers. He laughed shortly, a bark to reassure himself, and put on the light. Of course, there was nothing there.

He ran over to the window and at first he saw nothing outside, either; but then he thought he saw something like a rat fluttering under the street light just beyond the house. He turned back into the room, telling himself that he would be seeing things all over if he were not careful, and actually did begin to imagine dark patches here and there in the room; so that he was quite able to look at the incident logically, put out the light, and crawl back to bed, muttering to himself at the ridiculous spectacle of a respectable scholar having hallucinations about walking hands.

But he did not go at once to sleep. The illusion of the walking hand bothered him. He thought there was something in his memory somewhere, and began hopelessly to paw over the amassed increment of years of research and study. It came to him that somehow, somewhere, such a walking hand was connected with his late uncle. It was almost an hour later that he thought of the wrinkled, leathery object he had taken from the secret drawer in the Sheraton table and put into the pocket of his smoking-jacket. He got up at once, put on the light, and went over to the jacket to look for the thing.

It was not there.

Instantly he was beset by a nebulous fear: a thousand small memories began to crowd upon him, and he felt he must find the thing, wherever he had put it, and examine it or he would go mad with the thought of what it might be. He ran downstairs and searched the library, he looked into the kitchen, he examined even the cellar, but there was nothing, and the most painstaking scrutiny of the stairs showed nothing. So he came back to his room, with little beads of sweat cold on his forehead, felt once more in the pocket of his jacket, and there it was.

His relief was so great that he almost fell, but caught himself in time and took the thing out for a careful examination. He was relieved because he felt that his first search in the pocket had been too careless, though some imp of disbelief nagged at this thought. He held the thing now under the light and looked at it: it was far too small to have been what he saw in the moonlight, but it certainly looked like a hand: incredibly aged, certainly, and without bones, if ever it had any. But he could not deny that it might have been a hand, and the thought made him just a little sick. He took it back to the Sheraton table and returned it to the secret drawer, where he found far back in a corner the fragment of a candle: this he methodically took out and dropped into the waste-basket.

He began to worry now, and for the rest of the night hardly slept at all: he had fitful dreams, frightful, recurrent dreams in which he saw his saturnine old uncle grinning in his coffin: he saw him playing with a score of terrifying little brown hands which walked all over him, he saw himself pursued by a malignant hand: this was prophetic, but he did not know it. He could hardly wait for morning, and yet he was afraid that it might come.

The first thing he did was to go out and buy a paper, and there it was on the second page: *Second Strangling in St. John's Wood.* He felt faint; he sat down on the curb for a moment, and then looked around for a bench, where he sat for a longer while. He thought about himself and that infernal thing in the secret drawer: he was certainly not convinced, but it was enough to give him pause. He looked at the paper again, and read garbled snatches here and there: Doctor Trefethn had apparently been at work in his laboratory . . . evidence of a terrific struggle . . . nothing taken . . . Scotland Yard. He felt sick. And finally he thought of the British Museum.

Away he went, post-haste. He had a vague idea that he could find out what he wanted to know about hands, and after poring over some ethnological treatises and various papers on the instructive value of an artist's learning to draw hands well, he came to spirit hands, and finally to what he wanted: the Hand of Glory. "The hand of a dead man, in which a lighted candle has been placed, an instrument of magic prepared in a special manner." He read about it with growing incredulity: he could not credit his eyes: his scholarly mind scoffed at it, and at last he closed the occult book and went over to talk about it to old St. John, who knew everybody and everything. And to his horror, the old man took it all very seriously: he said that of course Harrick had known about that devilish uncle of his, hadn't he? Harrick was obliged to admit that he knew very little about his uncle except that he had undoubtedly been mentally unbalanced.

"Quite the contrary, old man," said St. John. "A very brilliant person, a very, very brilliant man. Quite saturnine, but then, he was much of a devil, you know. More than dabbled in the occult sciences: lived in them. He talked to me once about this Glory Hand, and I seem to remember a strange death by strangling not long after: a reporter for one of the papers who bothered your uncle continually about something or other: but of course, that may have been a coincidence. Still, it's very amusing to trifle with the idea, I always think."

He rambled on in this vein until Harrick could not have felt any worse if he had had a full meal of *amanita virosa:* compared to death from that, torture by strychnin poisoning would have been a pleasant passing. He escaped St. John as soon as possible, but was already done up. Nevertheless, he looked up the reporter's death in the back files of the *Times,* and it was very similar to Lennox's and Trefethn's. His first impulse was to go at once to the police and give himself up as a murderer, but reason quickly asserted itself: he began to imagine with a kind of grim humor how it would seem to Scotland Yard to have someone walking in on them and saying, "I have a Glory Hand that killed Professor Lennox and Doctor Trefethn: I didn't mean to do it." They would probably put him in a padded cell.

Standing on the street, with trams and busses and cars flying past him, children and older people bustling around him on all sides, and the policeman not far away, Harrick felt as if he were enclosed in some difficult dream and could never get

out again, though he might see and hear and feel the world around him. He could not convince himself about the Glory Hand, the thing in the secret drawer, and he began to tell himself that he must test it: he did not believe in magic: it was against his natural knowledge: but he could not very well tell himself that Lennox and Trefethn were not dead. So, feeling miserable, he went home: he had had nothing to eat all day, and still was not hungry, despite the feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He began to wonder about the black journal he had left in the secret drawer, and despite his growing aversion for the leathery relic there, he opened the drawer and took out the notebook. It was his uncle's, and it had jottings in it: some dates. For the most part the jottings were harmless enough, astrological chiefly, but by persistent reading, Harrick came upon a few things which shook his doubt: "Got it today." (The hand?) "Managed Burton today: Glory be: Glory was! 21st." Burton was the reporter's name: he had been killed on the 21st of April almost ten years ago. "I can dispense with the candle now: the hand need not remain invisible."

HARRICK put the journal back into the drawer. He hesitated over the Glory Hand, but after a bit he took it out and put it into his pocket. He had arrived at an impasse: he must know without doubt whether it was a Glory Hand or whether it was nothing but coincidence that Lennox and Trefethn had died like that, just when he had made certain wishes. *(Let no evil wish cross his lips, who owns me!)* It was fantastic, a little absurd, but being a gentleman in the tradition of gentlemen, Harrick felt that he must test the hand himself. But he lacked courage, and the streak of irony in him suggested a way out, an acceptable way he could take.

He called a cab and had himself driven out to the Lennox house in St. John's Wood, and there he saw old Lennox's son.

"There's something I want you to do for me, Richard," he said. "I have a little object here, which I want you to take in your hands sometime this evening, any time between now and midnight, and when you hold it, I want you to wish me dead: say it aloud, but wish it. Give me a little time before you do. And when you've wished, put it down and leave it. Come back in a few moments and see whether it's still where you left it."

He gave him the leathery hand.

"It sounds foolish," said young Lennox thoughtfully. "And this looks like a hand. Tell me how I can sincerely wish you dead, Harrick?"

Harrick looked at him and worried a little. "It is possible that perhaps I killed your father," he said cautiously.

Lennox looked his disbelief.

Harrick dabbed at his forehead with his handkerchief. "Will you do it, Richard?"

"Yes, if you insist, but what's this about dad?"

"Forget it," said Harrick, but his smile was sick.

He went out and started for home. Once he got out of sight of the Lennox house, going on foot, he began to look back every little while, scanning the pavement for any small moving object. The thought and the fear obsessed him so much that at last he took a cab home again. But there it was little better: he sat looking nervously at the clock, watching the second hand go around: at every sound he jumped, he leaped for a poker from the fireplace, he no longer felt safe. He caught himself believing the whole ghastly thing, from the legends about the Glory Hand and his uncle's unholy jour-

nal to the inferences to be drawn from the happenings of the immediate past.

Abruptly he decided that he would go somewhere and hide, a place where the Glory Hand would never find him: he hit upon Victoria, and away he went, hatless and bagless. He took a cab to the station, and sighed with relief when he found himself there, within earshot of the big trains. There he sat down, in the midst of light and people, and he felt he should be more at ease, but he was not: he kept thinking about the Glory Hand, and kept furtively watching the entrances. Here there were so many more than at his home, but he continued to watch until he thought he might go mad, and people were beginning to stare at him, a wild-looking elderly man, hatless and afraid.

He remembered suddenly that the Flying Scot was about to set out for the north, the fast night train, and on a sudden impulse he jumped up, bought himself a ticket, and boarded the train. He found himself alone in a compartment, but he wanted nothing more. He saw to the windows and locked the doors, and at last sank back shuddering into the seat, crouching toward a corner and breathing quickly as if he had only just succeeded in his flight. He felt that he had done it: the hand would never find him now, he would never know the feel of its swollen toughness against his neck.

The train roared through the night: fleetly the villages and farms, the hills, the valleys went by: they passed other trains on the down-run: once they were flagged to a stop, and afterward, Harrick caught himself listening for every sound, the faintest creak or scratching: he waited to hear a tapping, a rustling, a scuttering sound: he held his breath and waited, but there was nothing: the night sounds of the train, an occasional sound passed outside. There was nothing at all but this.

He sat at the windows in the dark and watched the country go past. They were coming on to the Scottish border, and Harrick was beginning to feel better: it was almost midnight now: the thing was done: there was nothing to it but his ridiculous imagination: he should have stuck to the Easter Island paper and thought of nothing else.

The faint line of dawn was coming in the east when he was startled out of a half-sleep by a sharp knock on the door. He struggled awake shouting, "Just a moment," and threw open the door, thinking to see the guard. But the guard was not there. He felt something brush against his foot, and slammed the door to, leaning against it. He looked down.

It was the hand. It was resting lightly on its fingers on his seat, as if waiting for him. He stood looking at it as if it were alive, and when it came scuttling toward him, he leaped over it, he bent and tried to hide his head in his hands, he fought away from the feel of it clawing against his legs, his waist; and at last he tried to fold himself into the seat.

But the hand found him, working its way like a rat to his neck.

Masquerade

By MEARLE PROUT

A brief but gripping tale of a struggle against stark horror in a lantern-lit garden—by the author of "The House of the Worm"

"MAY I cut in, please?"

It was as simple as that. Yet, for all the gay masquerade throng, Donald shivered at the voice. He looked at the intruder and was not reassured. Tall and gaunt, the man was clad in the long flowing robes of a priest of ancient Egypt. His eyes were shaded, nearly covered by the black hood of his mask, but as he looked into them Donald had the uncanny impression of looking across a great dark void. Below the line of the mask the face was thin and creased, yellowed like old parchment.

With the barest trace of a smile the intruder bowed and said again, "If you don't mind."

Donald hesitated. Strangely, he felt his partner would not object if he were to refuse the very usual request. But to refuse would be unthinkable. He released his partner, and in a moment the tall man had whirled her away. Yet Donald was aware of her gaze upon him as he threaded across the crowded floor.

Away from the dancers, he paused and looked for the first time at the card she had slipped into his hand.

"Leonora Starr."

The name was printed in simple pica type; beyond that, the card was blank.

He frowned at first, then smiled. She so obviously expected him to see her again. He recalled with pleasure her lithe surrender to his arms while they danced, the warmth with which she had pressed the small card into his hand.

Who was she? he wondered. The name, Leonora Starr, told him nothing. They had met less than five minutes before, and even then had spoken but little.

The music of the waltz rose to a higher, more exciting strain. Donald searched the crowd with his eyes until he found her, still dancing with the mysterious stranger. They were at the south end of the ballroom now, near the door that led into the garden. The tall man, Donald noted, danced gracefully but stiffly, as though he had once been an excellent dancer, but was now long out of practise.

Across the crowd Donald caught Leonora's eye, and something flashed between them. An appeal, he thought it was. His pulse raced while he stared across the intervening space, and then—his glance clashed with that of the giant. He was conscious of the same chilling sensation at the pit of his stomach, as though he were falling; felt the same prickling at the roots of his hair. . . . Then, in another whirl of the dance, the man had turned away.

A little group of people near by was not dancing. Donald strolled toward them, halted half-way and looked back across the floor. He felt a light touch at his elbow.

"That man who tagged you—who is he?" said Betty Cosgrove as he turned. She was obviously agitated.

"I've been wondering. Doesn't anyone know?"

"No—except that he wasn't invited."

"Are—you sure? It might be just the costume."

"No—none of the guests is so tall. Besides, he wasn't announced." She shuddered.

"He—he looks like a death's-head, or a mummy. If he asks me to dance, I'll faint."

Abruptly the music ceased, to be replaced by the hum of voices and scattered applause. Apprehensive now in spite of himself, Donald shouldered his way through the crowd in search of Leonora. She was not on the floor. Hurriedly he surveyed the guests again. The man too had disappeared. The garden, perhaps?

Quickly he stepped to the door. There was no moon, but the garden was dimly lighted by a single Japanese lantern hung near the center. Donald could see no one. Dense shrubbery bordered the walks, and in the far corner a thick grove of trees loomed black in the shadows. He drew a deep breath and walked swiftly toward it.

BEHIND him the music began again, a haunting Viennese melody in waltz time. He looked back at the lighted windows. People, in their brilliant costumes, were again taking the floor. No one else had come out after him; to all appearances he was alone in the garden. He hesitated, half minded to turn back. Fool's errand!

Suddenly, above the music, he heard a woman scream, a muffled scream that was not repeated. It came from the grove of trees. His heart leaping, he turned and ran toward it, searching his pockets for a weapon as he ran. There was none.

He reached the trees. It was not as dark there as it had seemed. The level rays of the Japanese lantern, though dim, shone redly through the shadows. Suddenly in his haste he stumbled over a creeper of vine, and, catching himself, stopped short at the sight before him.

At this spot the heavy growth of trees gave way to a circular clearing, and the ground was covered by a lush carpet of grass. The light of the Japanese lantern seemed to filter undiminished through the trees and become amplified at this spot, so that everything which occurred was as clear to the watcher as in the light of day. And at the very center of the circle, at the top of a small rise, was the horrifying tableau. Leonora was lying on her side, her face half buried in the grass; over her, his knee on her shoulder, his left hand covering her mouth, was the tall man in the priestly robe. In his right hand he held aloft a glittering knife with a long curved blade, which he held poised in a perpetual threat. He had not yet struck.

The man, disheveled by the struggle, could be seen better now. From the arm which held the knife aloft the robe had fallen away, revealing it to the shoulder; it was thin as bone, it had the appearance of bone stretched tightly over with yellow, parchment-like skin. His headdress was lost, revealing a smooth hairless head which seemed deathly white even in the red rays of the lantern. The mask, too, was gone, and his eyes—in the shadows they appeared like something which Donald, if he were to remain sane, dared not think about.

A cold perspiration beading his skin, Donald looked about him for a weapon, while the two before him held the same motionless pose. A stone, a broken limb of a tree, any weapon would suffice—if only the demon did not strike, if only Leonora could hold him back a moment

longer! In his excitement he never wondered why he had not already done so, why, if he wished to kill, he had not killed and fled minutes before. Nor did he wonder how Leonora, facing death, could wait for it so passively. If he had stopped to think of those things, to realize their meaning, perhaps he might have noticed other, more obvious, circumstances: that the music, which had sounded so loudly in the garden a few seconds before, had died to nothing the moment he had entered the hellish grove; that the light breeze from out of the west no longer fanned his cheek, and now did not even rustle the leaves of the trees; that the very starlight seemed to drip unwillingly through the interlaced branches overhead. . . .

Twenty feet to the left, Donald saw a spade leaning against a tree. He started for it, but at that moment a sudden burst of activity on the part of Leonora freed her mouth and she called weakly,

"Quickly—help!"

Being young, Donald could not resist that appeal. He left the spade untouched, and turned and ran to fling himself against the gaunt attacker.

With a single bound the other rose to meet his attack, the knife drawn to strike, the lips snarling. The girl too rose to her feet and stood.

"Back to the house, Leonora—run!" shouted Donald. He had halted, crouched ready to spring, ten feet from the towering skeleton before him.

But the girl stood still, apparently tense with excitement.

"You must kill him," she hissed, "or he'll kill me."

"Who is he?" Donald rasped.

"He's—a priest," she lied. "His name is Ozaman."

Donald knew that she was lying, though he could not tell how he knew it—nor why she was.

"Go to the house," he said again, "and send some men out; I'll keep him here."

A sardonic smile twisted the features of Ozaman.

"You—don't want me alone?" he taunted.

In that instant it happened. Leonora had crept up behind the priest; suddenly she charged him, grasped the hand that held the knife. The priest swung upon her, ready to crash a heavy fist upon her face. Donald rushed in.

He caught the blow in the chest. It staggered him. Then with all his power he flung himself forward and closed.

Donald was athletic. In college he had been a member of the wrestling team, had been rated fair at boxing. But he knew in a second that he had underrated his opponent. The arms of this fleshless skeleton were like bands of steel, the legs as firm as if rooted in the ground. Suddenly Ozaman laughed. He tossed the knife from him, picked Donald up bodily, whirled him through the air until he was dizzy, then threw him to the ground with stunning force. Then he dropped quickly upon him and pinned his arms to the ground.

Donald lay on his back in the grass, helpless, staring up at the twin caverns of the monster's eyes. A wave of revulsion shook him, left him weak and pale, his body wet with sweat. Those eyes again! Was he insane? But he knew that he was not. This was real. This was happening! Back there, behind those trees, was the ballroom, and a gay throng, and music, and laughter. And here—this!

His mind, stimulated by terror, worked fast. The knife! It had been lost in the struggle. Then, surely, Leonora—he twisted his head to look for her. She was standing on his left ten feet away, her eyes shining, her lips slightly parted.

He called to her. "Find the knife—and hurry!" he said.

She made no reply, but stood smiling, neutral. A gleam in the grass near her caught his eye.

"What's the matter? It's there at your feet. Help me!" he shouted.

As she made no move he realized that she would not—that what was to be done he must do for himself. A black rage gave new strength to his arms. She must be in league with the priest! She had confessed to knowing him. . . . He saw now that he had been lured into this unequal contest. But why?

The priest tightened his hold on Donald's arms again, so that Donald writhed with the pain.

"Why are you holding me? What do you want?" he cried at last.

"Only your body," said Ozaman softly.

His body! The man was insane!

If only he could reach the knife—if he could get an arm free!

He feigned a struggle, edging toward the knife as he fought. When he was again overcome, he was two feet nearer. He rested. Then another struggle, another two feet gained. He had a feeling the priest was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse, encouraging him to escape and then dashing his hopes. Well, there might be a surprize! . . .

Two more pretended struggles, and the knife was within his reach. Now if an arm were free. . . .

Suddenly the priest bent his head low, so that his fetid breath seared the nostrils of the prostrate man.

"I'm going to kill you now," he said.

Simultaneously he loosed Donald's arms and clutched his neck with bony fingers. Donald felt the breath in his lungs pent up, fighting for escape while he flailed his left arm in search of the knife. He grasped the smooth handle, balanced it a moment in his hand. He focussed his staring eyes upon the figure leaning low over him, aimed his blow well. As he struck, the priest inclined his head to the left, leaving a clean path for the knife. It severed the veins in his neck.

At once Donald felt his body galvanized as from an electric shock. He was aware of a mighty force penetrating his brain. Red flashes seemed to shoot from the priest's eyes, to play into his own. Giddiness and nausea as in a violent earthquake racked his consciousness. And then, for a moment, he fainted away.

When he again opened his eyes the scene was, to all appearances, unchanged. Over him were the same trees, the same. . . . He raised his hand to a gutting pain in his throat, felt something warm spurt over it. He looked. Blood! But surely this was not his own hand—this was thin, and bony. The garment which covered the arm was not his own either, but white and flowing—the garment of a priest! The words of Ozaman resounded in his brain like a death-knell:

"I want your body!"

And now his dimming eyes beheld a scene which tore his soul with despair. A man, clad as he had been, with the same proud tilt of the head, the same athletic carriage, but with eyes which glittered strangely now in the pale light, stepped toward a beautiful girl.

"Come, Leonora," he said, in a voice which Donald recognized as his own. "It is time to go."

She looked at him with a slow smile.

"You really are very, very handsome, Ozaman," she answered.

And as the eyes of the prostrate figure slowly filmed in death the now perfectly matched pair looked back at him and laughed with wild abandon.

A Gipsy Prophecy

By BRAM STOKER

"I REALLY think," said the doctor, "that, at any rate, one of us should go and try whether or not the thing is an imposture."

"Good!" said Considine. "After dinner we will take our cigars and stroll over to the camp."

Accordingly, when the dinner was over, and the *La Tour* finished, Joshua Considine and his friend, Doctor Burleigh, went over to the east side of the moor, where the gipsy encampment lay. As they were leaving, Mary Considine, who had walked as far as the end of the garden where it opened into the laneway, called after her husband:

"Mind, Joshua, you are to give them a fair chance, but don't give them any clue to a fortune—and don't you get flirting with any of the gipsy maidens—and take care to keep Gerald out of harm."

For answer Considine held up his hand, as if taking a stage oath, and whistled the air of the old song, *The Gipsy Countess*. Gerald joined in the strain, and then, breaking into merry laughter, the two men passed along the laneway to the common, turning now and then to wave their hands to Mary, who leaned over the gate looking after them.

It was a lovely evening in the summer; the very air was full of rest and quiet happiness, as though an outward type of the peacefulness and joy which made a heaven of the home of the young married folk. Considine's life had not been an eventful one. The only disturbing element which he had ever known was in his wooing of Mary Winston, and the long-continued objection of her ambitious parents, who expected a brilliant match for their only daughter. When Mr. and Mrs. Winston had discovered the attachment of the young barrister, they had tried to keep the young people apart by sending their daughter away for a long round of visits, having made her promise not to correspond with her lover during her absence. Love, however, had stood the test. Neither absence nor neglect seemed to cool the passion of the young man, and jealousy seemed a thing unknown to his sanguine nature; so, after a long period of waiting, the parents had given in, and the young folks were married.

They had been living in the cottage a few months, and were just beginning to feel at home. Gerald Burleigh, Joshua's old college chum, and himself a sometime victim of Mary's beauty, had ar-

rived a week before, to stay with them for as long a time as he could tear himself away from his work in London.

When her husband had quite disappeared, Mary went into the house, and, sitting down at the piano, gave an hour to Mendelssohn.

It was but a short walk across the common, and before the cigars required renewing the two men had reached the gipsy camp. The place was as picturesque as gipsy camps—when in villages and when business is good—usually are. There were some few persons round the fire, investing their money in prophecy, and a large number of others, poorer or more parsimonious, who stayed just outside the bounds but near enough to see all that went on.

As the two gentlemen approached, the villagers, who knew Joshua, made way a little, and a pretty, keen-eyed gipsy girl tripped up and asked to tell their fortunes. Joshua held out his hand, but the girl, without seeming to see it, stared at his face in a very odd manner. Gerald nudged him:

"You must cross her hand with silver," he said. "It is one of the most important parts of the mystery."

Joshua took from his pocket a half-crown and held it out to her, but, without looking at it, she answered:

"You must cross the gipsy's hand with gold."

Gerald laughed. "You are at a premium as a subject," he said.

Joshua was of the kind of man—the universal kind—who can tolerate being stared at by a pretty girl; so, with some little deliberation, he answered:

"All right; here you are, my pretty girl; but you must give me a real good fortune for it," and he handed her a half-sovereign, which she took, saying:

"It is not for me to give good fortune

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or bad, but only to read what the stars have said."

She took his right hand and turned it palm upward; but the instant her eyes met it she dropped it as though it had been red hot, and, with a startled look, glided swiftly away. Lifting the curtain of the large tent, which occupied the center of the camp, she disappeared within.

"Sold again!" said the cynical Gerald.

Joshua stood a little amazed, and not altogether satisfied. They both watched the large tent. In a few moments there emerged from the opening not the young girl, but a stately-looking woman of middle age and commanding presence.

THE instant she appeared the whole camp seemed to stand still. The clamor of tongues, the laughter and noise of the work were, for a second or two, arrested, and every man or woman who sat, or crouched, or lay, stood up and faced the imperial-looking gipsy.

"The queen, of course," murmured Gerald. "We are in luck tonight."

The gipsy queen threw a searching glance around the camp, and then, without hesitating an instant, came straight over and stood before Joshua.

"Hold out your hand," she ordered.

Again Gerald spoke, *sotto voce:* "I have not been spoken to in that way since I was at school."

"My hand must be crossed with gold."

"A hundred per cent at this game," whispered Gerald, as Joshua laid another half-sovereign on his upturned palm.

The gipsy looked at the hand with knitted brows; then suddenly looking up into his face, said:

"Have you a strong will—have you a true heart that can be brave for one you love?"

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....	May	May	May	May
June	....	June	June	June
....	July	July	July	July
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"I hope so; but I am afraid I have not vanity enough to say 'yes.' "

"Then I will answer for you; for I read resolution in your face—resolution desperate and determined if need be. You have a wife you love?"

"Yes," emphatically.

"Then leave her at once—never see her face again. Go from her now, while love is fresh and your heart is free from wicked intent. Go quick, go far, and never see her face again!"

Joshua drew away his hand quickly, and said: "Thank you!" stiffly but sarcastically, as he began to move away.

"I say!" said Gerald, "you're not going like that, old man; no use in being indignant with the stars or their prophet—and, moreover, your sovereign—what of it? At least, hear the matter out."

"Silence, ribald!" commanded the queen, " you know not what you do. Let him go—and go ignorant, if he will not be warned."

Joshua immediately turned back. "At all events, we will see this thing out," he said. "Now, madam, you have given me advice, but I paid for a fortune."

"Be warned!" said the gipsy. "The stars have been silent for long; let the mystery still wrap them round."

"My dear madam, I do not get within touch of a mystery every day, and I prefer for my money knowledge rather than ignorance. I can get the latter commodity for nothing when I want any of it."

Gerald echoed the sentiment. "As for me I have a large and unsalable stock on hand."

The gipsy queen eyed the two men sternly, and then said:

"As you wish. You have chosen for yourself, and have met warning with scorn, and appeal with levity. On your own heads be the doom!"

"Amen!" said Gerald.

With an imperious gesture the queen took Joshua's hand again, and began to tell his fortune.

"I see here the flowing of blood; it will flow before long; it is running in my sight. It flows through the broken circle of a severed ring."

"Go on!" said Joshua, smiling. Gerald was silent.

"Must I speak plainer?"

"Certainly; we commonplace mortals want something definite. The stars are a long way off, and their words get somewhat dulled in the message."

The gipsy shuddered, and then spoke impressively:

"This is the hand of a murderer—the murderer of his wife!" She dropped the hand and turned away.

Joshua laughed. "Do you know," said he, "I think if I were you I should prophesy some jurisprudence into my system. For instance, you say 'this hand is the hand of a murderer.' Well, whatever it may be in the future—or potentially—it is at present not one. You ought to give your prophecy in such terms as 'the hand which will be a murderer's,' or, rather, 'the hand of one who will be the murderer of his wife.' The stars are really not good on technical questions."

The gipsy made no reply of any kind, but, with drooping head and despondent mien, walked slowly to her tent, and, lifting the curtain, disappeared.

WITHOUT speaking, the two men turned homeward and walked across the moor. Presently, after some little hesitation, Gerald spoke.

"Of course, old man, this is all a joke; a ghastly one, but still a joke. But would it not be well to keep it to ourselves?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, not to tell your wife. It might alarm her."

"Alarm her! My dear Gerald, what are you thinking of? Why, she would

not be alarmed or afraid of me if all the gipsies that ever didn't come from Bohemia agreed that I was to murder her, or even to have a hard thought of her, whilst so long as she was saying, 'Jack Robinson.' "

Gerald remonstrated. "Old fellow, women are superstitious—far more than we men are; and, also, they are blessed—or cursed—with a nervous system to which we are strangers. I see too much of it in my work not to realize it. Take my advice and do not let her know, or you will frighten her."

Joshua's lips unconsciously hardened as he answered: "My dear fellow, I would not have a secret from my wife. Why, it would be the beginning of a new order of things between us. We have no secrets from each other. If we ever have, then you may begin to look out for something odd between us."

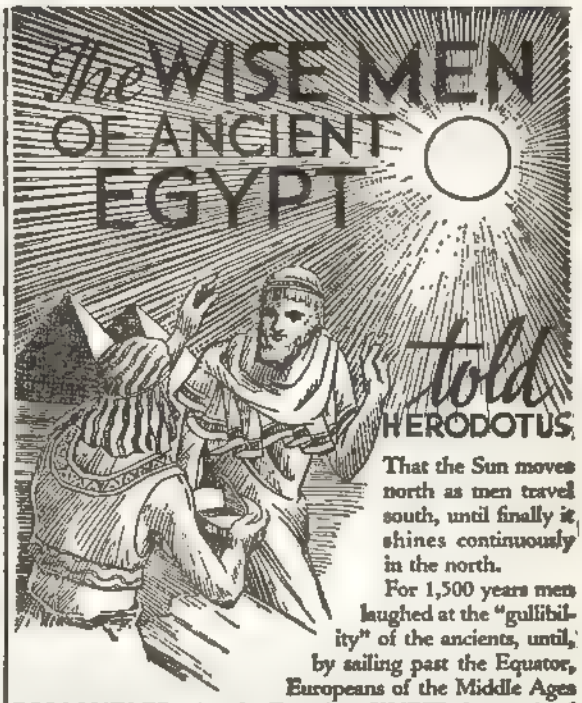
"Still," said Gerald, "at the risk of unwelcome interference, I say again: be warned in time."

"The gipsy's very words," said Joshua. "You and she seem quite of one accord. Tell me, old man, is this a put-up thing? You told me of the gipsy camp—did you arrange it all with Her Majesty?" This was said with an air of bantering earnestness.

Gerald assured him that he only heard of the camp that morning; but he made fun of every answer of his friend, and, in the process of this raillery, the time passed, and they entered the cottage.

Mary was sitting by the piano but not playing. The dim twilight had waked some very tender feelings in her breast, and her eyes were full of gentle tears. When the men came in she stole over to her husband's side and kissed him. Joshua struck a tragic attitude.

"Mary," he said in a deep voice, "before you approach me, listen to the words



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of Fate. The stars have spoken and the doom is sealed."

"What is it, dear? Tell me the fortune, but do not frighten me."

"Not at all, my dear; but there is a truth which it is well that you should know. Nay, it is necessary so that all your arrangements can be made beforehand, and everything be decently done and in order."

"Go on, dear; I am listening."

"Mary Considine, your effigy may yet be seen at Madame Tussaud's. The jurisimprudent stars have announced their fell tidings that this hand is red with blood—your blood. Mary! Mary! my God!"

He sprang forward, but too late to catch her as she fell fainting on the floor.

"I told you," said Gerald. "You don't know them as well as I do."

After a little while Mary recovered from her swoon, but only to fall into strong hysterics, in which she laughed and wept and raved and cried, "Keep him from me—from me, Joshua, my husband," and many other words of entreaty and of fear.

Joshua Considine was in a state of mind bordering on agony, and when at last Mary became calm he knelt by her and kissed her feet and hands and hair and called her all the sweet names and said all the tender things his lips could frame. All that night he sat by her bedside and held her hand. Far through the night and up to the early morning she kept waking from sleep and crying out as if in fear, till she was comforted by the consciousness that her husband was watching beside her.

BREAKFAST was late the next morning, but during it Joshua received a telegram which required him to drive over to Withering, nearly twenty miles. He was loth to go; but Mary would not hear of his remaining, and so before noon he drove off in his dog-cart alone.

When he was gone Mary retired to her room. She did not appear at lunch, but when afternoon tea was served on the lawn, under the great weeping willow, she came to join her guest. She was looking quite recovered from her illness of the evening before. After some casual remarks, she said to Gerald: "Of course it was very silly about last night, but I could not help feeling frightened. Indeed I would feel so still if I let myself think of it. But, after all, these people may only imagine things, and I have a test that can hardly fail to show that the prediction is false—if indeed it be false," she added sadly.

"What is your plan?" asked Gerald.

"I shall go myself to the gipsy camp, and have my fortune told by the queen."

"Capital. May I go with you?"

"Oh, no! That would spoil it. She might know you and guess at me, and suit her utterance accordingly. I shall go alone this afternoon."

When the afternoon was gone Mary Considine took her way to the gipsy encampment. Gerald went with her as far as the near edge of the common, and returned home.

Half an hour had hardly elapsed when Mary entered the drawing-room, where he lay on a sofa reading. She was ghastly pale and was in a state of extreme excitement. Hardly had she passed over the threshold when she collapsed and sank moaning on the carpet. Gerald rushed to aid her, but by a great effort she controlled herself and motioned him to be silent. He waited, and his ready attention to her wish seemed to be her best help, for, in a few minutes, she had somewhat recovered, and was able to tell him what had passed.

"When I got to the camp," she said, "there did not seem to be a soul about. I

went into the center and stood there. Suddenly a tall woman stood beside me. 'Something told me I was wanted!' she said. I held out my hand and laid a piece of silver on it. She took from her neck a small golden trinket and laid it there also; and then, seizing the two, threw them into the stream that ran by. Then she took my hand in hers and spoke: 'Naught but blood in this guilty place,' and turned away. I caught hold of her and asked her to tell me more. After some hesitation, she said: 'Alas! alas! I see you lying at your husband's feet, and his hands are red with blood.' "

Gerald did not feel at all at ease, and tried to laugh it off. "Surely," he said, "this woman has a craze about murder."

"Do not laugh," said Mary, "I cannot bear it," and then, as if with a sudden impulse, she left the room.

Not long after, Joshua returned, bright and cheery, and as hungry as a hunter after his long drive. His presence cheered his wife, who seemed much brighter, but she did not mention the episode of the visit to the gipsy camp, so Gerald did not mention it either. As if by tacit consent the subject was not alluded to during the evening. But there was a strange, settled look on Mary's face, which Gerald could not but observe.

In the morning Joshua came down to breakfast later than usual. Mary had been up and about the house from an early hour; but as the time drew on she seemed to get a little nervous, and now and again threw around an anxious look.

Gerald could not help noticing that none of those at breakfast could get on satisfactorily with their food. It was not altogether that the chops were tough, but that the knives were all so blunt. Being a guest, he, of course, made no sign; but presently saw Joshua draw his thumb across the edge of his knife in an uncon-

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scious sort of way. At the action Mary turned pale and almost fainted.

After breakfast they all went out on the lawn. Mary was making up a bouquet, and said to her husband, "Get me a few of the tea-roses, dear."

Joshua pulled down a cluster from the front of the house. The stem bent, but was too tough to break. He put his hand in his pocket to get his knife; but in vain. "Lend me your knife, Gerald," he said. But Gerald did not have one, so he went into the breakfast room and took one from the table. He came out feeling its edge and grumbling. "What on earth has happened to all the knives—the edges seem all ground off?"

Mary turned away hurriedly and entered the house.

Joshua tried to sever the stalk with the blunt knife as country cooks sever the necks of fowl—as schoolboys cut twine. With a little effort he finished the task. The cluster of roses grew thick, so he determined to gather a great bunch.

He could not find a single sharp knife in the sideboard where the cutlery was kept, so he called Mary, and when she came, told her the state of things. She looked so agitated and so miserable that he could not help knowing the truth, and, as if astounded and hurt, asked her:

"Do you mean to say that *you* have done it?"

She broke in, "Oh, Joshua, I was so afraid!"

He paused, and a set, white look came over his face. "Mary!" said he, "is this all the trust you have in me? I would not have believed it."

"Oh, Joshua! Joshua!" she cried entreatingly, "forgive me," and wept bitterly.

Joshua thought a moment and then said: "I see how it is. We shall better end this or we shall all go mad."

He ran into the drawing-room.

"Where are you going?" almost screamed Mary.

Gerald saw what he meant—that he would not be tied to blunt instruments by the force of a superstition, and was not surprized when he saw him come out through the French window, bearing in his hand a large Ghurka knife, which usually lay on the center table, and which his brother had sent him from Northern India. It was one of those great hunting-knives which worked such havoc at close quarters with the enemies of the loyal Ghurkas during the mutiny, of great weight but so evenly balanced in the hand as to seem light, and with an edge like a razor. With one of these knives a Ghurka can cut a sheep in two.

When Mary saw him come out of the room with the weapon in his hand she screamed in an agony of fright, and the hysterics of last night were promptly renewed.

Joshua ran toward her, and, seeing her falling, threw down the knife and tried to catch her. However, he was just a second too late, and the two men cried out in horror simultaneously as they saw her fall upon the naked blade.

When Gerald rushed over he found that, in falling, her left hand had struck the blade, which lay partly upward on the grass. Some of the small veins were cut through, and the blood gushed freely from the wound. As he was tying it up he pointed out to Joshua that the wedding ring was severed by the steel.

They carried her fainting to the house. When, after a while, she came out, with her arm in a sling, she was peaceful in her mind and happy. She said to her husband:

"The gipsy was wonderfully near the truth; too near for the real thing ever to occur now, dear."

Joshua bent over and kissed the wounded hand.

THE EYRIE

A MAN named John John Seymour, who lives in New York, writes to the Eyrie: "The principles of Numerology have much to do with an author's popularity, with his success or failure. If Oscar Wilde had used his full name, Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde, he would not (so one Numerologist tells me) have been plunged into the terrible scandal and disgrace that clouded the last years of his life. I am but a novice in Numerology, but I would like to see, if only just once, the full names of some of the authors who have made WEIRD TALES so popular, so that I can determine (to my own satisfaction, at least) whether their success would be any greater if they used their full names. For instance, what do the initials H. P. stand for in H. P. Lovecraft's name?" [Though we are not numerologists, we willingly print for John John's benefit the full names of some of our best-known authors and artists, as follows: Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Robert Ervin Howard, Henry St. Clair Whitehead, Seabury Grandin Quinn, Hugh Doak Rankin, Virgil Warden Finlay, Paul Frederick Ernst, Abraham Merritt, Edgar Hoffmann Price, Victor Rousseau Emanuel. —THE EDITOR.]

The Necronomicon

Fred C. Miles, of New Providence, New Jersey, writes: "Have not written to the Eyrie for several years, but the uniform excellence of the December WEIRD TALES has, at long last, evoked this burst of praise. *The Fire of Asshurbanipal* was, as the cover proclaimed, a superb story. It fills one with an almost nameless dread to contemplate future issues of WEIRD TALES without the name of Robert E. Howard gracing its pages. No doubt many of his stories will be reprinted, and I cast the first vote for a Solomon Kane tale—*Wings in the Night.* I regard that as one of Howard's finest works; indeed, it is one of the most truly weird stories ever printed in the magazine. St. John's cover for December is actually a weird illustration, something rather rare of late, excluding, of course, the same artist's cover for the October issue. I am very glad to see that Virgil Finlay is to do a cover in the near future.

Man Can Now Talk With God

"A new and revolutionary religious teaching based entirely on the misunderstood sayings of the Galilean Carpenter, and designed to show how we may find, understand and use the same identical power which Jesus used in performing His so-called Miracles," is attracting world wide attention to its founder, Dr. Frank B. Robinson, noted teacher, author and lecturer.

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His illustration for *The Woman at Loon Point* is the best story-head for December. Arthur R. Mink's letter in the December Eyrie was very good. I was overjoyed to see someone taking a slap at the anti-scientifictionists. There really should be more science-fiction in WEIRD TALES. Science in a yarn does not preclude its being weird, and many good weird-fiction authors have shown themselves capable of turning out excellent fantasy with a science content. Your note revealing the genesis of the *Necronomicon* in the mind of H. P. Lovecraft was a great disillusionment. I had had hopes of one day being able to read a copy of the mad Arab's opus, and when you deflated those hopes something went out of my life. Are the other books mentioned by Lovecraft, Robert Bloch and Clark Ashton Smith but children of prolific imagination?"

One Gloomy Evening

Richard F. Jamison, of St. Louis, writes: "Masterful! Of course I refer to H. P. Lovecraft's creation of shudd'ry horror, *The Haunter of the Dark*. I read this one on a gloomy eve with the rain pouring and the wind sighing, a perfect night for a perfect story. Kuttner's gruesome tale runs a close second; in fact, with the exception of the Lovecraft yarn the three short-shorts were the best stories in the issue. *The Cyclops of Xoatl* was *not* weird, and neither was it interesting. Two-Gun Bart was the counterpart of many a cheap western film hero. But enough of this; the Lovecraft story alone was worth the price of the issue."

A Pæan of Praise

Gertrude M. Breazeale, of Prospect, Oregon, writes: "Just purchased the largest tablet I could find, so that I'd have more room to express my long-restrained enthusiasm. Although this will chiefly be a pæan of praise for Virgil Finlay, I want to say first of all that I have been a faithful reader of your magazine for many years. I seldom find cause to complain, and even when I run across a story of a type I do not like, such as a weird-scientific, interplanetary, or gruesome torture tale, I make allowance for its literary merit, and the fact that it take all types to make a world, and if we all liked the same things it would be a dull life indeed. During my many years as a constant reader of your excellent magazine, I've never summoned enough courage to send a letter, being a timid soul who dislikes forcing personal opinions on anyone. However, Finlay's exquisite drawings have me so stirred up that I had to write or *burst!* Even if I did not like your magazine, I would buy it to obtain his pictures. Have started a scrapbook of his work, as some fiend in human form stole my first copy. Now I cut out his pictures as soon as I've read the stories. When you begin to use him as a cover artist, you will have the perfect magazine. Words really fail me when trying to express my reactions. I could rave on for hours about the delicate nuances of light and shade, the beauty of line, his peculiar method of shading that sets his work apart from any other I've seen so far; the infinite variety, and utterly different types in each picture, and his thorough understanding of *true weirdness*. And speaking of nudes—what could be more breath-takingly *lovely* than the one illustrating that witch story in the November issue? Without a trace of vulgarity, too. And the sinister and dramatic charm of *The Man in Black*. Why, he's more than an artist—he's a genius! As to the controversy about nudes, I say, use them where the story calls for them. I noticed with satisfaction that Finlay familiarizes himself with the story before dashing off a drawing, so his nudes are neither ridiculous, vulgar, nor incongruous. So many artists seem to draw nudes without rime or reason, apparently only to please the salacious-minded. . . . I was glad to see you used his pictures in the November issue for the best stories, in my estimation. He really makes the tale come to life, because his people are so utterly *natural*, without losing the weird touch where necessary. Just got the December copy, so will soon be lost to the world till I've devoured it."

The Theater Upstairs

Robert A. Madle, of Philadelphia, writes: "Although the cover of the December issue is not as delicately drawn as Mrs. Brundage's beautiful pastel sketches, it is much more weird-looking, and corresponds with the title of the magazine. Of course, the entire contents pleased me immensely, but praise is directed especially to *The Theater Upstairs*, by Manly Wade Wellman. Even though the inevitable happens to the main character, it held my attention from the beginning to the

end. It is a curious fact, but did anyone ever notice what the usual outcome of the short stories is? Nine out of ten times the character is killed off in some eery method, but it *does* make the story more effective. I notice that John Russell Fearn has finally decided to write weird fiction, and I believe he will become one of the masters."

Fearn's Debut in WT

Jack Johnson, of Philadelphia, writes: "I notice with highest pleasure J. Allen St. John's cover drawing for Howard's yarn, *The Fire of Asshurbanipal.* Again I repeat that St. John's drawings are much weirder than Brundage's. I've often wondered what Brundage would be like in an inside illustration. . . . I can hardly wait to see what Finlay looks like on the cover. The best story in the issue was H. P. Lovecraft's weird tale, *The Haunter of the Dark. The Woman at Loon Point* vies with Howard's yarn for second place. . . . Fearn's debut in WEIRD TALES seems to me to be highly successful. His tale takes third place. Here's hoping that this new author writes other equally good stories for future issues of WT."

Finlay's Nudes

Sylvanus K. Post, of West Palm Beach, Florida, writes: "I am writing this to you in the hopes that you will receive what I say in the same spirit in which it is sent—that of constructive suggestions for the betterment of your magazine. First, let me say that your new artist Virgil Finlay is what induces me to write to you; having such a marvelous artist, you ought to take full advantage and do marvelous things with him. I think the nude figure he drew for the December number in the story *Out of the Sun* is one of the most charming things I have ever seen done anywhere, and I have been collecting nudes as things of beauty for a long time, from every source possible. This nude was what induced me to buy the magazine. It is the smoothness of Virgil's work that is so attractive. Second, all of your stories should be of the general type of *Out of the Sun;* I do not mean to interfere with your policy, but stories of astral possession and werewolfery are somewhat worn out by now. I can assure you that I for one would buy more of your magazines if I could be sure that most of your stories would not be about werewolves or vampires of the

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Black Forest type. Your authors do not seem to realize that there are vampires of a far more insidious type that they could talk about, and one of your stories illustrates this: *The Portrait of a Murderer;* also *The Album.*"

Oogy! Oogier! Oogiest!

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Well—I must admit your new cover designs are mighty interesting. Mr. St. John is very realistic in his portrayals. Guess we all like a bit of variety. It's a grand change from Mrs. Brundage's beauties. Of course, I hope you won't forget her either. The whole of the December issue was good. I was glad to see Otis Adelbert Kline again. Conan is gone—but Robert E. Howard turned out a good yarn in his *Fire of Asshurbanipal.* Somehow he always incorporates a marvelous jewel of stupendous proportions in his yarns—and don't I just eat it up! The illustration for the tale is perfectly horrid—there is just enough shadow to make the other world entity vague and frightening. A good picture. Well, well, well—*Out of the Sun* was quite different. Virgil Finlay sketched the beauty as quite a modern—even to the current fashion of full lips. As for the story itself, I can add nothing further other than I enjoyed it muchly. Edgar Daniel Kramer proves a philosopher with his verse, *Vespers.* I felt much better after I read it. Lovecraft is always good for an exciting yarn. *The Haunter of the Dark* was all of that and more. The suspense was terrible—my eyes just about popped out of their sockets at the awful being that could bear only the dark. Now Fearn gives us a tale of hypnotism in a strange form. One of those affairs that makes you sit tight until the climax—wondering what's gonna happen next—and then it does happen and ya relax all in one heap. Iss O. K., Mr. Fearn. An'nen lil Robert Bloch gives us voodoo—very primitive—very skeery—very—well—I found *Mother of Serpents* darn good! I've mentioned Kline before—E. Hoffmann Price and he worked out a squirmy, gaspy story. Imagine a cyclops in these days—my, my! Uh—Virgil has again proved himself a good illustrator for *The Woman at Loon Point.* He has captured the transition from man to wolf marvelously—the horror-stricken faces of the other two characters makes a most pitiful scene. Derleth comes up to standard with his collaborator, and I was well satisfied. Well—the strangest of all ghost stories (or is it a ghost story?) is *The Album* by Amelia Reynolds Long. It was a well-written piece—leaving much to the imagination—something to be studied—food for thought—something unanswered—yet I do not want to know the answer. *The Theater Upstairs* was a ghost story—or am I wrong again? It's—a—a—spooky! An' it's leading me to believe that if the narrator would keep searching for that theater upstairs, he will eventually lose his mind. I liked it. Gosh—I—uh—um—this Henry Kuttner is a man after me own heart—he writes the oogiest tales—and invariably has the characters or settings German. *It Walks by Night* was grand, coupled with gruesome unnamable things that move and are dead and the German—*ja* he is a good Landsmann. Pussonlly, I'm inclined to believe he likes graveyards. But then, they are the scariest things when one is walking by alone at night."

Stories of Reincarnation

Van Rosicruis, of Sioux City, Iowa, writes: "Some time ago I asked when you intended to give us tales of reincarnation. Do you mind if I repeat the question? Why not pass it on to the talented authors who contribute to WEIRD TALES? Among them there surely must be one or more fully capable of delving into that phase of the mysteries of life and emerging with something worth while." [How about *The Globe of Memories,* by Seabury Quinn, in this issue?—THE EDITOR.]

The Ghosts Return

Charles H. Deems, of Batesville, Arkansas, writes: "Genuine ghost stories seem to have made a comeback with the October and November issues. In the former number, *The Lost Door* by Dorothy Quick (always liked that name) is a beautifully told and fascinating ghost story. Also in this issue was C. L. Moore's *The Tree of Life.* I found this story more interesting than any of Moore's previous stories. Most of this author's stories are practically non-conversational, which is difficult for me to digest. In the latter number, two more ghost stories appear; both were fine. . . . It is becoming more difficult every month to pick the best

story, but I nominate *Witch-House* by Seabury Quinn for first place. It was the type of story I would like to see more of. No wonder so many readers wanted Lovecraft's *Pickman's Model* reprinted! It is a horribly delicious story. Seems to creep with horror. The terror that Pickman's art inspired is conceivably put over. Virgil Finlay's illustrations are perfect for WEIRD TALES."

Werewolves Out-moded?

Miss Eve Barnett, of Binghamton, New York, writes: "I am a very new reader of your magazine, this (December) being only my second book. I found the majority of your stories fantastic, breath-taking and exciting. Also I found to my disappointment that others of your stories are too foolish and too common. For instance, I am sorry to see stories of werewolves in this magazine. Movies and dime-thrillers have outplayed them. . . . In the December issue, *Out of the Sun* was too short, but fantastic. In the November issue, *Pickman's Model* was swell, but left too much to the imagination."

Praise and Dispraise

Bruce Bryan, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Just a few lines on the current (December) WT. I much enjoyed Lovecraft's yarn, which I pick for first place. And the illustration was swell except for the hero's 'coiffure'. That's the most skeletal-looking picture of a skeleton I ever saw—and I ought to know because I've dug up and reassembled hundreds of 'em. *Out of the Sun* was good, and I rate it second. But one fallacy struck me—the author speaks of other shapeless lumps generated from the sun-rays that did not live or develop. Seems to me that over a period as long as the diary describes there would be a number of other forms of life that would incubate. . . . *The Cyclops of Xoatl* was written around a fine idea—but it was written all around it! The hero is too unconvincing and unsympathetic and his exclamations and epithets somehow seemed too picturesque. And in addition, the old Mexican Hernandez turned out to be quite a character. In one paragraph he spoke in broken English or fractured Spanish. But a paragraph or two later he'd be spouting English with the diction of a litterateur. Derleth-and-Schorer's work is usually exceptionally well written and presented in

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a realistic fashion, but *The Woman at Loon Point* is just another werewolf yarn, much as *Four Wooden Stakes* was just another vampire skit. The cover ought to have a lot of news-stand appeal, but for the high literary standard of 'our mag' I think it's too trashy. Maybe some of these comments sound like knocks. They're not meant to be. What appears to me as time-worn or uninteresting may intrigue plenty of other readers. And what I like most of them probably avoid. Even those stories I list as mediocre, I read with interest because they come under the category of 'weird'. I would delight in a WEIRD TALES that appeared every month with a plain cover void of picture but bearing a weird design and the usual masthead. But I realize that this would not appeal to the general public who pore over the news stands and pick out the gaudiest (and sexiest) appearing offerings. If something like that could be worked out, however, a concession might be made to those whose imaginations have to be stimulated by pictures with the inclusion of a frontispiece. By the way, a couple of months ago young Earl Peirce, Jr., dropped into my office with a yarn called *The Last Archer*. I read it and thought it *one of the finest* weird tales I have ever read. I understand you have accepted it, and he's told me of the amplification of the old curse you suggested and which he made; so believe me I'm looking forward to its publication with a lot of interest."

In Praise of H. P. Lovecraft

Henry Kuttner, of Beverly Hills, California, writes: "Congrats on several counts: the forthcoming Finlay cover; the December cover, unusual and attractive; the Lovecraft story. As usual, the Lovecraftian tale tops all others in the issue, and the only wonder is why HPL doesn't write, and you don't run, more stories of this nature. Lovecraft remains, as always, supreme in his ability to write of the utterly unearthly in a disturbingly convincing manner. The Dweller in Providence avenged himself effectually on Bloch for his double demise in *The Dark Demon* and *The Shambler from the Stars!*"

Ladies in the Raw

Walter A. Thorne, of Riverdale, Maryland, writes: "Congratulations on your December issue of WEIRD TALES, the best in over two years, which was almost a hundred per cent *weird!* The lone exception to this group of excellent tales was *A Passion in the Desert*. I can't for the life of me see anything supernatural about a dumb brute's attachment for one of the human species, although in this instance the beast's taste can be questioned since I think that of the two actors in the desert drama the panther had the more admirable character. Maybe the beastie was suffering from a 'fixation', as the psychologists so adeptly put it. The title, I don't care a hoot if Balzac did conceive it, was certainly out of place in your magazine, being far more appropriate for those publications that peddle sensational cheap tales of true love and romance. Or was that the impression that the author intended to convey by this literary attempt? . . . One more word. Why do the ladies customarily run about in the raw in WEIRD TALES? I mean in the stories, of course. They may be slightly exposed to the elements in the illustrations, but what does that matter? Most of the WEIRD TALES fanciers purchase the magazine for reading purposes, not to look at the pictures. However, I would like to know why an undraped lady is considered to be more weird than one with three or four ounces of clothing? All the ladies at the bathing-beaches look either comely or grotesque, certainly not supernatural, unless they have warts on their toes or something."

St. John and Brundage

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "I must compliment St. John again upon his excellent cover design. His last two illustrations are a great improvement over some of his earlier work. I for one favor the alternating of those two celebrated artists, Brundage and St. John. I am very glad to notice that Finlay will do a cover in the near future. I am all agog wondering what it will look like. I hope that it is as good as his past interior illustrating. The best story in the issue was Howard's epical tale, *The Fire of Assburbanipal*. It seems indeed a pity that Howard left the world at the height of his career. Closely tagging upon Howard's tale was Lovecraft's story, *The Haunter of the Dark*. *The Cyclops of Xoatl* seemed to me out of place in WEIRD TALES. It reads like an ordinary thriller instead of the weird tale it's supposed to be. The rest of the stories were all good."

An All-Star Issue

John J. Weir, of South Amboy, New Jersey, writes: "The cover of the December issue is the second weird cover I have seen on your magazine in my two years of reading it. The first was the October issue. You showed good sense, there. This is shown by the acclamations of the readers. And now we are to see a cover by Virgil Finlay! With such a variety we won't have to worry about the cover any more. There were three stories that were superb in the December issue. They were *The Fire of Asshurbanipal, The Haunter of the Dark* and *It Walks by Night.* Howard's tale is really weird and in my opinion it is second only to Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark.* Kuttner's little yarn was good. Why doesn't he try to write a longer story? . . . *The Woman at Loon Point* had a good plot but it was badly handled. Say, why don't you have an all-star issue? One that, from the front to the back, would be the best yet. One having Lovecraft, Bloch, Quinn, Moore, Kuttner, Smith, and, if there are more, a story by Howard."

A Plea for Serials

E. M. Stubbs, of Detroit, writes: "I was delighted to see another cover by St. John. His covers are weird, so don't lose him. Also, I am pleased to see that Virgil Finlay will finally do a cover. Your stories this month were all good. I list them as follows: (1) *Mother of Serpents—Haunter of the Dark* (tie); (2) *A Passion in the Desert;* (3) *The Fire of Asshurbanipal. The Cyclops of Xoatl* would have been much better without Two-Gun Bart. The weirdness of the story was destroyed by too much western flavor. I hope you are not going to discontinue serials. They are always the best stories." [We will shortly begin a startling weird serial novel, *The Last Pharaoh,* by Thomas P. Kelley.—THE EDITOR.]

Our Artists

The cover of this issue was painted by Virgil Finlay, who also illustrated three of the stories. The illustration for Henry Kuttner's yarn, *I, the Vampire,* was drawn by James Mooney, Jr. *The Vaunsburg Plague* and *At the Time Appointed* were illustrated

NEXT MONTH

STRANGE ORCHIDS

By DOROTHY QUICK

HERE is a fascinating story of the weird and tragic fate that befell eighteen lovely girls, who had suddenly disappeared without a trace. It is a gripping story of bizarre and strange happenings, and gorgeous flowers nourished in living flesh.

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by Harold S. DeLay. The art heading for the Weird Story Reprint was drawn by Hugh Rankin.

Brief Comments

Horace Ferris, of Santa Monica, California, writes: "I think you should have a picture of Conan, standing alone, on a windy hill. This picture to be done by Virgil Finlay and to enhance the cover of one of your forthcoming issues. It is the least you can do for the memory of a great story-teller and for his sorrowful legion of left-behind readers."

Charles Henry Mackintosh, of Daytona Beach, Florida, writes: "I think WEIRD TALES is to be congratulated on keeping strictly weird and not straying off into the so-called 'science-fiction', which all seems very much alike after the first month or so."

Donald Coreyon, of Petoskey, Michigan, writes: "I would like to see the following stories used as reprints: *The Picture in the House,* by H. P. Lovecraft; *The Abysmal Horror,* by B. Wallis; *Sadastor,* by C. A. Smith; *The Venus of Azombei,* by C. A. Smith."

Alvin V. Pershing, of Anderson, Indiana, writes: "The horror cover by St. John on the October issue was certainly an excellent piece of art and carried horrific intimations. It was truly weird."

August W. Derleth writes from Sauk City, Wisconsin: "The December issue of WT was one of the best for a long time; I really believe the magazine is definitely improving, and no one is happier than I to know it. I was delighted to see HPL's fine story, am looking forward to reading again his next."

Henry Kuttner writes from Beverly Hills, California: "Suggestion for reprint: that grand yarn, *Lochinvar Lodge.*"

Most Popular Story

Readers, let us know which stories you like best in this issue. Write a letter, or fill out the coupon at the bottom of this page, and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Your favorite story in the December issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was H. P. Lovecraft's eldritch tale of horror, *The Haunter of the Dark.* This was closely pressed for first place by the late Robert E. Howard's posthumous tale of weird adventure, *The Fire of Asshurbanipal.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE FEBRUARY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why? ----------

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COMING NEXT MONTH

A CLEAR shaft of light struck across the glen from over the high moorland of Vorangowl and picked out the tower like a searchlight; every ivy-leaf stood out like carved metal, every irregularity of weathered stone showed up, discolorations of dripping rain from the roof, the gold patina of lichen, the rusty brown of winter leaves lodged in iron-barred windows—all was mercilessly clear. And, on the breast-high battlemented wall that ran round the roof, a man leaned with face directly turned to Alan and the castle window at which he stood. The man's hair and beard flamed red as torchlight.

"The story of Red Alastair does us no credit," went on the Earl. "He was a wild, dissolute, savage man, from all the records. You can read him up in the library if you're interested. But as to haunting the Keep—that's nonsense, the talk of ignorant peasants, the sort of story that people like to invent about any old ruin."

"So no one lives there, no one climbs up to the roof to look round, not for any reason?" Alan's voice was harsh with effort.

"No one. It stands there as you see it now—deserted! I've been up, of course. Jamie has the key, the only key, and never allows anyone to take it from him. You can borrow it any time you like. When I succeeded to Glenhallion there were constant scandals and wild tales because visitors were allowed to go over the Keep and explore it. I locked up the place, and since then there've been no more tales of ghosts and people being pushed off battlements or crushed behind doors and all the rest of it. I've not been inside for a year or more, and certainly no one else has. A good specimen of Tenth Century architecture it is, and that's all. If you see Red Alastair when you go over it, let me know. I rule here now; he's had his turn and made a very bad job of it by all accounts."

The two men turned back to the fire, the Earl chuckling, Alan feeling more angry, more stupidly bewildered than he'd ever felt in his whole vigorous sane existence. He believed in ghosts no more than he believed in the Divine Right of kings, and he connected both illusions with forgotten centuries when people had no bathrooms, enjoyed heretic-burnings in place of cinemas and night-clubs, and fought for "the Glory of God" or some such unpractical cause. . . .

This unforgettable story of the skeptical Alan, who was plunged into a hideous adventure, makes a powerful weird story that you cannot afford to miss—a story about a lovely, beautiful girl whose life and happiness were held in thrall to an evil picture, with unutterable horror waiting for her in its cloudy depths. This fascinating novelette will be printed complete in the March WEIRD TALES:

THE DARK STAR

By G. G. Pendarves

——Also——

STRANGE ORCHIDS

By DOROTHY QUICK

A goose-flesh story of the weird and tragic fate that befell eighteen lovely girls—a gripping tale of strange happenings, and gorgeous flowers.

THE LAST ARCHER

By EARL PEIRCE, JR.

One of the strangest stories ever written—a tale that begins in the time of Richard the Lion-Hearted and the Crusades, and ends in our own day.

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By HENRY HASSE

A strange and curious tale of cosmic horror, of the Outer Ones from beyond the galaxy, and a soul-shattering experience of stark terror.

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By EANDO BINDER

The story of an unscrupulous alchemist whose sins brought down upon him a weird and terrible doom.

THE BROOD OF BUBASTIS

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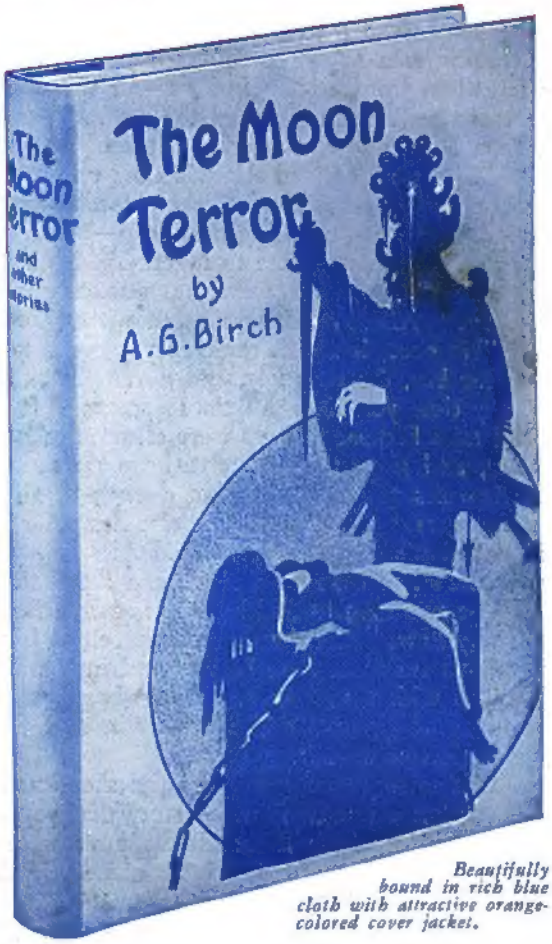

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